



International
Labour
Organization

► Office for Italy and San Marino

► Survey findings of unpaid care work in Italy

Key messages



► **Survey findings of unpaid care work in Italy**

Key messages



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► Overview¹

In Italy, women carry out 71 per cent of unpaid care work (housework and care of children and other family members). Yet, despite the fundamental contribution of unpaid care work to the economy and society, the lack of a monetary consideration and the perception that tasks related to care work do not require specific skills and abilities are at the origin of the undervaluation of this work and the frustration of millions of unpaid care workers.

At the international level, many several initiatives have been made to recognize, reduce, redistribute, reward and represent care work. These include the 2024 Resolution adopted by the governments and the social partners of the 187 Member States of the International Labour Organization (ILO) that sets out guidelines for decent work policies in the care economy and the 2013 programme of revision of labour statistics that aims to collect data on both paid and unpaid work, including care and volunteer work, through national surveys.

The survey on unpaid care work in Italy is the result of the collaboration between Federcasalinghe (the Italian association of unpaid domestic care workers) and the ILO Office for Italy and San Marino. It aims to shed light on the working and social conditions of individuals who provide personal care of family members (direct care) and/or housework (indirect care). The survey also aims to highlight the importance of care work and value its economic and social contributions. Coordinated by Gianni Rosas, Director of the ILO Office for Italy and San Marino and Senior Specialist on Employment Policy and Conditions of Work, and Federica Rossi Gasparrini, President of Federcasalinghe, the survey was conducted through an online questionnaire administered to a regionally stratified sample of approximately 3,000 members of Federcasalinghe who provide unpaid care work as main activity. The data was collected between May and July 2024 by the regional and local coordinators of Federcasalinghe.

The information collected through the survey focuses on the characteristics of individuals who carry out unpaid care work as their main activity, their household composition, and the reasons for performing this type of work. It also covers the average time spent on various activities (e.g. housework, childcare and care for dependent individuals), the sharing of care duties, paid care work as a secondary activity, the intentions to seek paid work, the satisfaction levels of care workers, and the impact of care work on other aspects of daily life. A series of questions was designed to collect information on the condition and needs of caregivers, i.e. individuals caring for live in dependent adult and elderly persons.

¹ This Note collects the main findings and messages of the ILO Report *The hidden value of care work in Italy*, which publication is forthcoming.

► Key messages from the survey on unpaid care work in Italy

1. Recognizing the value of unpaid care work means acknowledging the dignity of care workers and the fundamental contribution of care work to society and the economy.

Care work is fundamental to the well-being of children, adults, and the elderly, as well as to progress and social justice. Although still largely invisible, unpaid care work ensures the stability of the social fabric and the functioning of the economic and welfare systems.

Besides recognizing the dignity of unpaid care workers, valuing the work performed within the household is also a way of measuring and appreciating the contribution of family members to the economy and society. Measuring unpaid care work gives proper value to women's work, which otherwise often remains unseen and unappreciated.

Unpaid care work accounts for 85 per cent of all unpaid work in Italy. It is estimated that the total number of hours of direct and indirect care work in Italy in a year is 60.7 billion, with an estimated monetary value of €473.5 billion. Seventy-one per cent of this value is produced by unpaid care work carried out by women. The estimated contribution of unpaid care work to Italy's GDP is around 26 per cent (see Box 1).

► Box 1. The economic value of unpaid care work

85%	Share of unpaid care work in total unpaid work in Italy
71%	Women's contribution to unpaid work
26%	GDP generated by unpaid care work
60.7 bn	Hours spent on direct and indirect care work
473.5 bn	Value in euros generated by unpaid care work
336 bn	Value in euros generated by women's unpaid care work

Source: Estimate based on data from the 2014 Time Use Survey of ISTAT.

The prevailing perception among the respondents to the ILO-Federcasalinghe survey is that childcare is significantly more valued than housework and care for dependent adults and elderly persons. Only one-third of those who carry out housework activities and provide care for dependent adults and the elderly believe that their work is highly valued by others. One in ten respondents perceives that care duties they perform as having little value, while two in ten believe that others see unpaid care work as being of low value.

In 2013, the International Conference of Labour Statisticians revolutionized data collection systems by introducing guidelines for surveys conducted by statistical institutes worldwide. The new definition of work introduced by the conference covers all activities, whether paid or unpaid, that human beings carry out to produce goods and services. Collecting these data disaggregated by gender is necessary to develop more effective and evidence-based policies that recognize this work and eliminate gender inequality in the division of care duties between women and men. Such statistical surveys could also include information on the needs, expectations, and support services of those performing unpaid care work.

2. Unpaid care work affects women's participation in the paid labour market, with important implications on the demographic transition and sustainability of welfare systems.

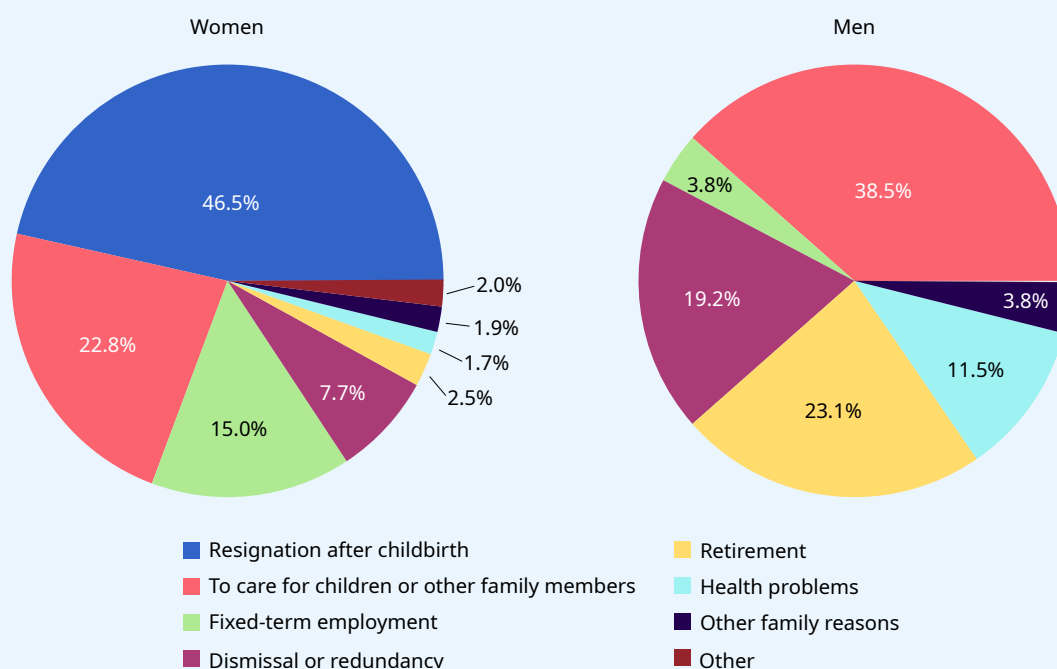
Survey data point to the burden of unpaid care work being reflected in low participation in the paid labour market, despite the medium-high level of education of the interviewees (59.7 per cent have completed secondary education and 28.8 per cent hold a university degree). The vast majority of women who participated in the survey do not seek paid work due to care responsibilities and other family reasons (82.6 per cent), whereas the main reasons for men not seeking paid work are childcare and care for elderly relatives (62.2 per cent). Also, the official statistics show that in Italy 12.2 million people were inactive in the second quarter of 2025. Of these, more than 3.2 million stated that they were unable to participate in the paid labour market due to family care responsibilities: 95.1 per cent (or 3,054,000) were women and 4.9 per cent (or 149,000) were men.

Among the interviewees, almost one in two women (46.5 per cent) left work in conjunction with the birth of children (see Figure 1). This is often due to a lack of support services, inflexible working hours and arrangements, low wages, poor work-life balance, discrimination, and an unequal distribution of care responsibilities.

Gender differences are another relevant reason why care workers leave paid employment. The loss of paid work (due to retirement, dismissal or redundancy) mobility) and care for children or parents were the reasons for leaving paid work given by 42.3 and 38.5 per cent of men, respectively.

Around 25 per cent of respondents reported that paid work was a secondary activity for them, with women being significantly less likely than men to engage in paid work (approximately 23 per cent of female interviewees reported having a paid job, compared to around 66 per cent of male interviewees). These figures are in line with those provided by national statistics.

In 2024, the employment rate of 57.7 per cent was the lowest among EU countries. Some studies have estimated that bringing this figure in line with the EU-27 average (70.8 per cent in 2024) would significantly reduce the negative impact of demographic change on the labour market. Increased female participation in the labour force would also have a positive effect on the economy, while some analysts estimate that shrinking demographics will lead to a 9 per cent reduction in Italian GDP by 2050.

► **Figure 1. Reasons for leaving paid employment**

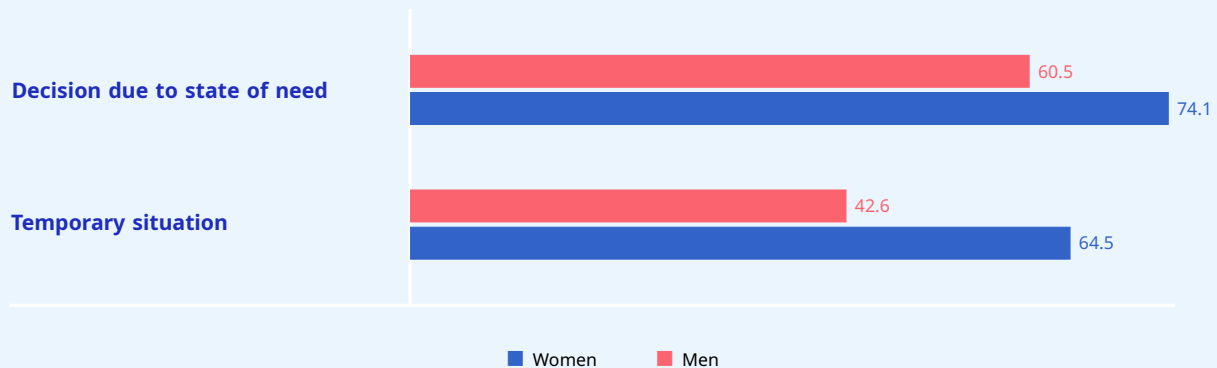
Source: ILO-Federcasalinghe survey on unpaid care work.

3. Rather than being a choice, unpaid care work is often motivated by a temporary state of need that is prolonged over time (trap effect).

For the vast majority of respondents, the decision to engage in unpaid care work rather than being a choice was prompted by necessity and a lack of alternatives. This is particularly true for almost three-quarters of women (74.1 per cent), compared to 60.5 per cent of men (see Figure 2).

When they first started providing family care, almost two-thirds of female interviewees (64.5 per cent) believed this would have only been temporary, whereas among men, the share was 42.6 per cent. This expectation has however changed over time, as the average number of years spent in care work is 13.5 years for women and almost 10 years for men.

► **Figure 2. Reasons for undertaking care work and expected initial duration, by sex (in percentage)**



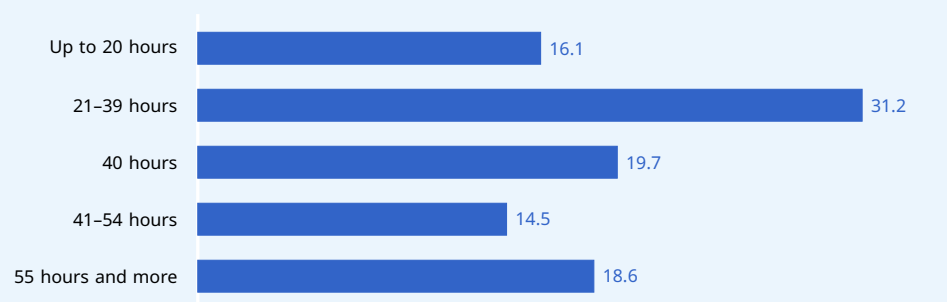
Source: ILO-Federcasalinghe survey on unpaid care work.

The perception of unpaid care work as temporary is more widespread among younger workers (over 80 per cent of people up to the age of 49). This figure drops considerably to one third for people aged 50 and over. Almost half of the women (or 46.5 per cent) who participated in the survey moved from paid to unpaid work in conjunction with childbirth. As many of them got older, their childcare responsibilities decreased and, at the same time, their responsibilities towards either dependent or independent adults and the elderly increased. This created a continuum of unpaid care work, also known as the “trap effect”, which lasts throughout the lifecycle.

4. Hours devoted to unpaid care work often surpass those of paid employment and frequently span more than one generation (sandwich effect).

Italy ranks second in the European Union, after Portugal, in terms of the time that women devote every day (306 minutes) to unpaid work. It also ranks third, after Portugal and Greece, in terms of the gap of daily time devoted by men to the same work (133 minutes), with women spending 2.3 times longer than men.

For over half of survey participants who performed unpaid care work (52.8 per cent), weekly hours exceeded those of any paid employment, with 40 hours or more devoted to care (see Figure 3). This share was higher among women (54 per cent) than men (34 per cent). Nearly one-third of respondents (31.2 per cent) reported spending between 21 and 39 hours per week on unpaid care work.

► **Figure 3. Weekly hours spent on unpaid care (in percentage)**

Source: ILO-Federcasalinghe survey on unpaid care work.

Three-quarters of the respondents reported that care work took the form of a combination of direct and indirect care (housework and care for children, adults, and the elderly). In 25 per cent of cases, it was also combined with paid work as a secondary activity. The number of hours devoted to unpaid care work increases with age, peaking among those aged 30–49, before gradually declining. At younger ages, women are primarily engaged in housework and childcare, as well as caring for independent adults. As they grow older, they spend more time caring for dependent individuals, particularly the elderly. The results of the survey show that among women engaged in unpaid care work, about 60 per cent of those aged 30–59 reported to be squeezed by the so-called “sandwich effect” as they were simultaneously engaged in the provision of care for more than one generation (e.g. their children and the elderly family members).

The tasks commonly performed by unpaid care workers correspond to three distinct occupations in the ILO’s International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08): domestic worker, babysitter, and personal care worker. These occupations require specific skills, knowledge and abilities, as well as core competencies. In addition to those that fall squarely within these professions, unpaid care work also includes tasks that overlap with other occupations, particularly in the health, childcare, and food preparation sectors.

5. Women make up the majority of caregivers for dependent adults and older persons, and they frequently face a high risk of burnout as a result of excessive workload.

Women bear the largest share of care for dependent adults and older persons within the home (90.6 per cent). Almost two-thirds (61 per cent) are over the age of 60 and carry a high hourly workload. Caregivers’ time commitment is significantly greater than that of other care workers: more than 40 per cent devote 55 hours or more per week to caregiving, while a further 15 per cent spend between 40 and 54 hours. Several caregivers reported weekly averages exceeding 80 or even 90 hours, as well as being permanently available throughout the day.

In contrast to other forms of unpaid care work, approximately 31 per cent of caregivers also engage in paid employment as a secondary activity, averaging 30 hours per week. For nearly two out of ten of these workers (or 19.3 per cent), this is often made possible by the recourse to paid domestic workers and by flexible work arrangements associated with certain occupations. Among those combining unpaid care with paid employment, 25 per cent are medium to high-level professionals, while 19 per cent are in administrative occupations.

► **Table 1. Workload related to providing care to dependent adults and older persons**

Hours worked	Women	Men
Up to 20 hours	12.9	15.3
From 21 to 39 hours	30.3	40.0
40 hours	3.7	0.0
From 41 to 54 hours	11.1	17.6
55 hours and more	42.0	27.1
Total	100	100

Source: ILO-Federcasalinghe survey on unpaid care work.

Only three out of ten caregivers (29.5 per cent) share care responsibilities with their partner and only 7.7 per cent dedicate 16 hours or more to sharing responsibilities. Caring for others is a necessity for 67.8 per cent of caregivers who participated in the survey (65.9 per cent of men and 68 per cent of women).

Nearly three out of ten caregivers (29.5 per cent) share care duties with their partners. Most of these latter devote less than 16 hours to shared caregiving duties, while only 7.7 per cent spend 16 hours or more. Caring for dependent family members is largely a necessity. More than two-thirds of caregivers (67.8 per cent) who participated in the survey reported that they took on this role because they had no alternative to the provision of direct support to their dependent family members (65.9 per cent of men and 68 per cent of women).

In Italy, caring for people with Alzheimer's disease alone involves around three million caregivers. Several studies indicate that caregivers face a high risk of stress-related conditions, including burnout, anxiety and depression, due to their working conditions—particularly the physical and mental demands and the limited time available for rest and leisure. Estimates suggest that between 25 and 40 per cent of caregivers are exposed to such risks. Applied to Italy, this would correspond to between 750,000 and 1.2 million caregivers facing potential health risks. These challenges are further compounded by a pervasive sense of isolation and a lack of adequate support.

The demand for qualified professionals to care for dependent people, particularly older family members, is steadily increasing. By 2030, nearly one-third of the Italian population will be aged 65 or over, and almost 9 million of them may require care due to dependency.

6. To reduce the risk of poverty in old age, social security coverage and benefits should be expanded. At the same time, long working hours and excessive workloads require stronger prevention measures.

Fewer than two in ten respondents participated in a public or private pension fund, with even a lower share among caregivers (just 11.2 per cent). Failure to participate in the houseworkers' pension fund set up by the National Social Security Institute (INPS) could be due to the scheme's requirements (minimum contribution, years of paid contribution and age of the worker), the current amount of the monthly benefit - which is quite low in the case of a minimum contribution, and to the competitiveness of the social allowance compared to the current monthly pension for houseworkers. Failure to participate in a private pension fund may be due to the high costs involved, given that nearly four in ten respondents consider their personal and household financial

situation to be unsatisfactory. Data on participation in pension funds suggests that many people are at risk of falling into poverty in old age. This assumption is supported by the young age of many respondents (30–49 years), their lack of participation in paid work, their early exit from the labour market after childbirth, and the trap effect.

Working hours and multiple care responsibilities affect the likelihood of accidents at home. Approximately six in ten respondents reported having suffered an accident in the year prior to the survey, with women more exposed to the risk than men (60.4 and 25.6 per cent, respectively). This rate is approximately three times higher than the overall rate of work-related accidents recorded in 2024. Although with different incidence rates, cuts or open wounds and falls are the most recurrent type of accident for both women and men (see Table 2).

► **Table 2. Domestic accidents involving unpaid care workers, by typology and sex (in percentage)**

Type of accident	Women	Men
Fall (slip, trip, fall from height)	26.5	33.3
Struck, crushing, or body parts injured	16.5	9.1
Cuts or open wounds (accidental) or cut	30.4	27.3
Suffocation	3.0	0.0
Foreign objects in the eye, ear, etc.	4.8	9.1
Poisoning/intoxication	2.1	0.0
Burns or scalds	13.1	12.1
Health problems due to the use of chemical agents	1.4	0.0
Injuries (wounds, fractures) due to domestic violence	0.5	6.1
Other	1.7	3.0
Total	100	100

Source: ILO-Federcasalinghe survey on unpaid care work.

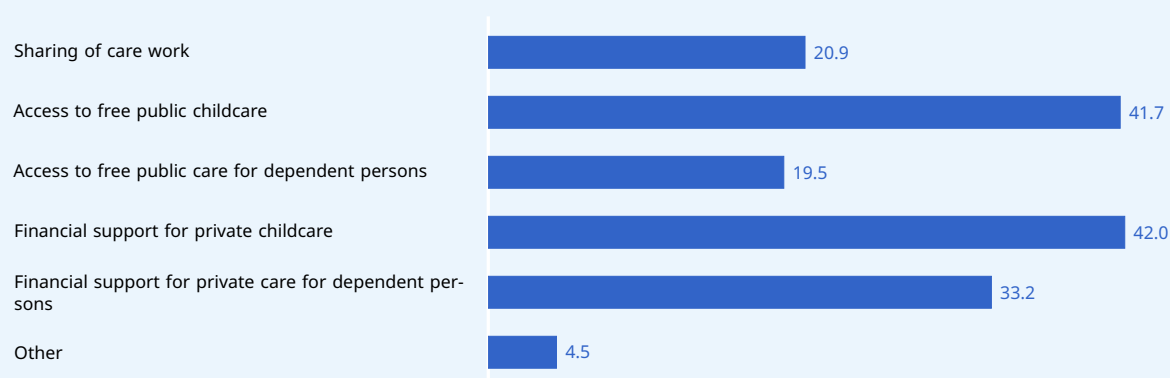
7. Unpaid care workers often lack support within the household and in accessing available services.

The burden of unpaid care work remains heavy, due to the uneven distribution of care responsibilities within households and the lack of services for children and dependent persons. Only 18 per cent of unpaid care providers receive help from their partner, and even then, for fewer than 16 hours per week on average. Access to paid domestic help remains limited, covering only 15.5 per cent of respondents. This is likely due to households' financial constraints and the lack of public financial support, which reaches only 6 per cent of respondents.

The survey data provide clear information on the type of support needed by people providing family care, namely childcare services (42 per cent), care for dependent adults and older persons (33.2 per cent), and a more equitable sharing of care responsibilities with other family members (21 per cent). Regarding childcare services, respondents requested equal access to free public childcare services (currently covering only one third of children aged 0–3) and financial support for private services. Regarding care services for dependent adults and elderly people, financial support to cover the costs of care services is the most requested type of support (over 33 per cent of responses), rather than access to free public services (19.5 per cent).

The survey also provides clear information on the types of support needed by people engaged in family care (see Figure 4), namely childcare services (42 per cent), care for dependent adults and older persons (33.2 per cent), and greater sharing of care responsibilities with other family members (21 per cent). Regarding childcare services, the support required relates equally to access to free public childcare (which currently covers only one third of children aged 0–3) and to financial support for accessing private services. With respect to care for dependent adults and older persons, the most frequently requested type of support concerns not so much access to free public services (19.5 per cent of respondents), but rather financial support to cover the costs of care services (over 33 per cent of respondents).

► **Figure 4. Type of support required by unpaid carers (in percentage)**



Note: The total exceeds 100 per cent, as the questionnaire allowed for multiple responses.

Source: ILO-Federcasalinghe survey on unpaid care work.

Around one-third of respondents (32.6 per cent) would like to transition from full-time caregiving to paid employment (33.5 per cent of women and 14.7 per cent of men). Among those engaged in both unpaid caregiving and paid work, 89.5 per cent of women and 70 per cent of men would prefer to transition to full-time employment as their main activity. Respondents identified the following types of support: flexible working hours (23.4 per cent), remote working (18.5 per cent), childcare services (15.9 per cent), care services for dependent persons (10.2 per cent), financial assistance for children and other dependent family members (15 per cent), support in finding employment (6.6 per cent), and appropriate training (5.2 per cent).

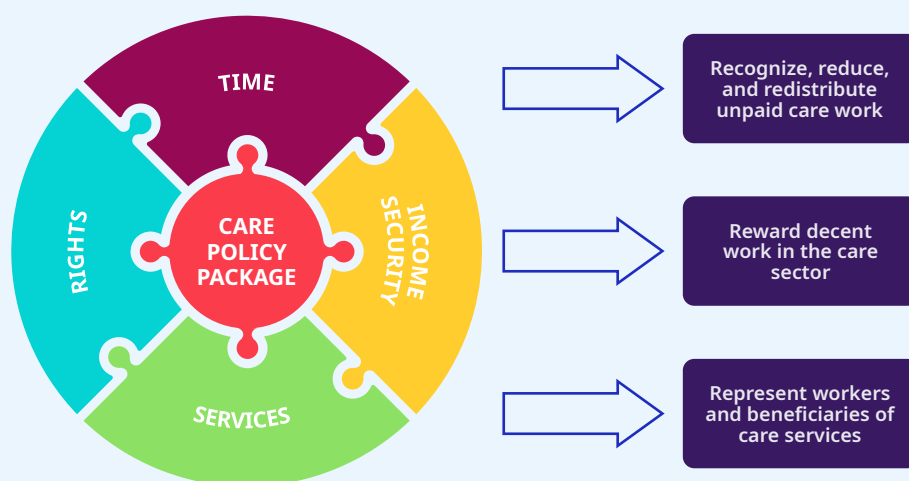
8. Developing and implementing a national care strategy based on international and European principles and guidelines.

In recent years, many EU and non-EU countries have adopted national care strategies based on approaches for the whole sector and including both paid and unpaid care work. The aim of these strategies is to improve the services provided to beneficiaries and the working conditions of workers. Inspired by international and European guidelines and strategies, these policies integrate economic, labour, social and migration measures to promote health, employment, working conditions, access to quality services, and individual and collective well-being. These policies can be transformative when they contribute to the legal recognition of unpaid care workers, such as caregivers, and the value of their work, improve working conditions, and redistribute care responsibilities between women and men, as well as between households and the state.

Adopted in 2015 by the Heads of State and Government, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, includes a specific target (target 5.4) that aims to recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through public services, infrastructure, social protection policies, and to promote shared responsibilities within families, in accordance with national standards. This target acknowledges the valuable contribution of care work to individual and social well-being.

The adoption of the 2024 international agreement by governments, employer organizations and trade unions from 187 ILO Member States at the International Labour Conference reaffirmed that, like any other form of work, care work is not a commodity, and that everyone should have access to quality care services that ensure decent working conditions for those providing them. Taking a holistic approach that links paid and unpaid care work with paid employment, the agreement establishes a set of guiding principles according to a rights-based approach, as well as a series of integrated policies that aim to recognize, reduce and redistribute care work, and to remunerate care workers and represent the interests of care workers and care service recipients (see Figure 5 for the so-called 5R Framework).

► **Figure 5. International policy framework for decent work in the care economy**



Source: ILO, Resolution concerning decent work and the care economy, International Labour Conference, 112th Session, 2024.

Adopted in 2022, the European Care Strategy aims to improve the quality, affordability, and accessibility of care services for children, older persons, and those in need of support. It also aims to support care workers and promote work-life balance. This strategy includes measures to reform long-term care systems, update targets for early childhood education and care (the Barcelona Targets), and promote gender equality through initiatives such as increased paternity leave and improved working conditions for caregivers. By adopting a rights-based approach to care, Member States have committed to increasing participation in care services, supporting home- and community-based care, and developing and implementing national plans and measures in line with the EU strategy by June 2024.

9. Strengthening the representation of the interests of unpaid care workers and their access to services.

Strengthening the representation of the rights and interests of care workers and care recipients requires building alliances between different organizations and associations to ensure that they adequately represent collective needs and interests.

Although the representation of unpaid care workers is gaining visibility through various initiatives, including the adoption of the ILO's 2024 Tripartite Declaration of Principles, it remains partial and fragmented. The Declaration calls on governments, employers' organisations and trade unions to "promote the voice and representation of, and consult with, care worker organizations, including those of domestic workers, community health and care workers, and migrant workers, organizations of employers of care workers and unpaid family carers, where these exist". It also aims to strengthen collaboration mechanisms among organizations representing paid care workers, care recipients and civil society organizations, which often represent unpaid domestic care workers, such as houseworkers, caregivers and other unpaid care providers. The objective is to raise awareness of care work issues at the national level, including through the participation and leadership of care workers and their representatives in decision-making processes. It further seeks to support the social mobilization of organizations, networks and movements advocating for the rights of unpaid care workers, including women, children and young people. In addition, helpdesks and related services can support individuals providing unpaid care. These services include the provision of information on legislation, care services and other benefits, as well as training, career guidance, and emotional and psychological support.

10. Information and awareness-raising activities on unpaid care work and working conditions are needed to improve recognition of its social and economic value, and to promote the dignity, respect and equal opportunities of those performing such work.

A paradigm shift in the recognition, valuation and redistribution of unpaid care work requires addressing stereotypes entrenched in society. Greater awareness can foster recognition of care workers' contributions, improve living and working conditions, reduce inequalities, and support a future based on equity and social justice. Although unpaid care work forms the backbone of Italy's welfare system, it is neither captured in official accounts nor afforded equal status with other forms of work. Raising public awareness through information campaigns on the value of care work to society and the national economy would promote its recognition and appreciation. Many women who provide unpaid care continue to bear these responsibilities without adequate support. Awareness-raising activities can contribute to changing societal perceptions of women's role in care work and to reducing gender inequalities. Without adequate recognition, care workers risk being denied equal opportunities, regardless of their role or whether they receive monetary compensation for their work.

Advancing social justice, promoting decent work

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