

Concept Note

Caring in Crisis:

Exploring the Impacts of Climate Change on Care Responsibilities and Poverty

CSW68 Side Event

Date and time: March 20th, 2023, from 3:00 to 4:15 PM

Venue: United Nations Headquarters – Conference Room 12

Format: In-person (with live streaming)

Target Audience: Governments, civil society organizations (including care workers and care receivers' organizations), philanthropic and international organizations, academia, and private sector entities.

English-Spanish-English interpretation available

Background:

In recent years, the centrality of care work in sustaining lives, societies, and our planet has come to the forefront of debates on gender equality, women's economic autonomy, and poverty elimination. This shift is largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the unprecedented recognition of women's disproportionate care responsibilities. Global stakeholders have endorsed the need to recognize, reduce, and redistribute care work, invest in care policies and systems, and robust social protection systems for paid and unpaid care workers. Such measures have been highlighted as key to promoting women's well-being and enhancing their educational attainment, participation and formalization in the labor force, and access to recreational activities and spare time, thus significantly reducing poverty and securing more inclusive societies.

However, as the care agenda gains significant momentum worldwide, it becomes urgent to address the diverse needs and interests of women who provide care, including migrant women, women in rural contexts, indigenous women, and women of African descent, amongst others. These groups of women not only face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination but also face greater care responsibilities due to several structural challenges. These challenges may include a lack of care-supporting infrastructure and services, precarious labor conditions, and public exclusion or criminalization. Such marginalization is exacerbated by the climate crisis not only increases the care workload but disproportionately affects these women. This escalation risks intensifying poverty levels and widening gender gaps.

Emerging evidence suggests that the increased frequency and intensity of extreme climate events and the reduced availability of natural resources (such as firewood and water) increase women's and girls' care and domestic work responsibilities, exacerbating time poverty. Also, migration, displacement, the health impacts of climate change, and environmental degradation increase unpaid care work.^{1,2} Moreover, climate-related

¹ MacGregor, S., Arora-Jonsson, S., and Maeve Cohen. 2022. "Caring in a Changing Climate: Centering Care work in Climate Action". *Oxfam Research Backgrounder series*. Boston: Oxfam America.

² UN Women. 2023. *The Climate-Care Nexus: Addressing the Linkages Between Climate Change and Women's and Girls' Unpaid Care, Domestic and Communal Work*. New York: UN Women.

disasters and emergencies also hinder women’s possibilities to participate in decision-making spaces and processes regarding climate change solutions.

Nevertheless, despite persisting challenges, women, especially those in disadvantaged communities, play a pivotal role in climate action, including engaging in community-centered unpaid care work activities, such as stewardship of water resources and preserving biodiversity. Their contributions in these areas, often unrecognized and undervalued, are crucial in building resilient communities, safeguarding the environment, and contributing to the sustainability of life.

Although the evidence is clear, the interlinkages between care work and climate change have frequently been overlooked in policy formulations, program implementation, and academic research. This side event at the 68th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW68) is dedicated to a comprehensive exploration of the intricate connections between care work, intersectionality, and the climate crisis, particularly as they disproportionately affect indigenous, afro-descendent, migrant, and rural women. Discussions will also recognize these women’s unpaid care work for their families and communities, their pivotal contributions in the conservation of biodiversity and the development of adaptive strategies to combat the effects of climate change. Moreover, it will explore alternatives to scale investment in climate and care policies, aiming to alleviate poverty and promote just, inclusive, and sustainable futures. In the session, we will also learn from a new action research program supported by Canada’s International Development Research Centre to address these interconnections. The goal is to foster a deeper understanding of these complex dynamics and to promote equitable and sustainable practices that empower women and, by extension, their communities, to thrive in the face of climate adversity.

Objectives:

- Analyze the linkages between care work, intersecting identities, and the climate crisis.
- Identify required policies and measures to address the care and climate nexus to promote gender equality and reduce poverty.
- Recognize the critical roles and contributions of indigenous, afro-descendent, migrant, and rural women in unpaid care, biodiversity conservation, and climate change adaptation, highlighting the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and environmental sustainability.
- Enable stakeholders from multiple sectors to reflect and discuss diverse aspects of the care economy in the context of the climate crisis.

Agenda

3:00–3:06	Opening Remarks
3:06–3:20	Keynote Speech: Caring in Crisis: The urgency of tackling care through an intersectional approach for a sustainable and just future.
3:20–4:00	Panel discussion: Climate change and its effects on the care

	<p>responsibilities and poverty amongst migrant, rural, indigenous, and women of African descent.</p> <p>The discussion will focus on how climate change affects the care responsibilities of women from diverse marginalized groups, and how that, in turn, affects poverty levels. It will also explore how, through mainly unpaid care work, these women address climate change and play their pivotal role in climate mitigation and adaptation. It will also delve into the essential connections between climate action and care policies.</p>
4:00-4:15	<p>Closing Remarks: Conclusions and next steps for an inclusive, sustainable and gender-just care economy.</p>