



XVI Regional Conference  
**on Women**  
in Latin America and the Caribbean  
Mexico City, 12–15 August 2025

# The Care Society

## Governance, Political Economy and Social Dialogue for a Transformation with Gender Equality



UNITED NATIONS

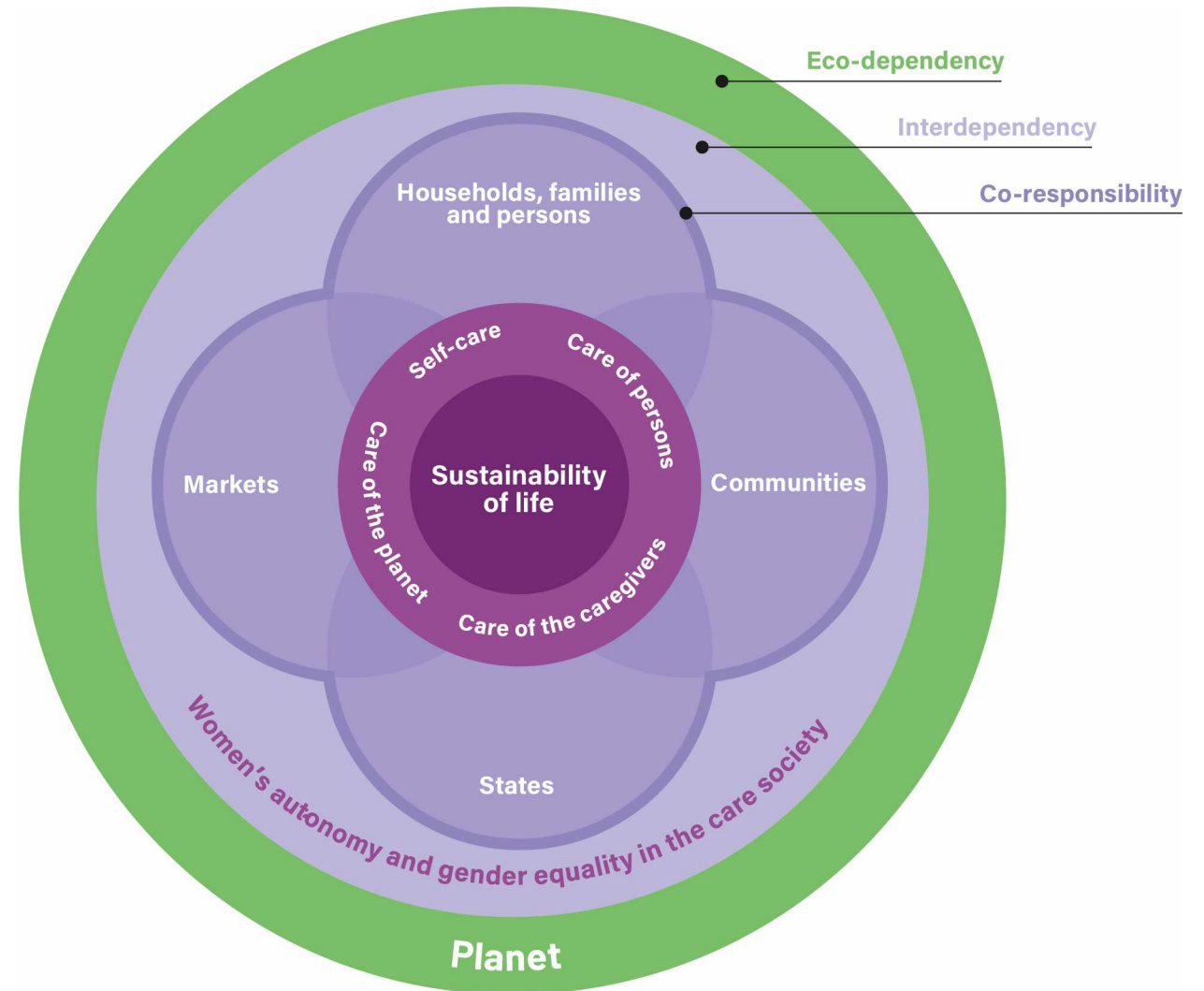
ECLAC

# The care society: a new paradigm for a vital transformation

- Moving towards the care society —a new paradigm developed in recent years— is one of the vital transformations required to foster more productive, inclusive and sustainable development.
- Countries are facing a care crisis:
  - The growing demand for care related to population ageing is exacerbated by existing care deficits, which surpass existing capacities of services, infrastructure and people to provide care.
  - The sexual division of labour and social organization of care is highly unequal.
- Progress in the region in understanding care as a need, a right, a global public good and a sector that drives the economy constitutes a paradigm shift with tremendous potential to transform the unacceptable realities of gender inequality in all its dimensions.
- This document introduces two innovative approaches that complement the paradigm developed in recent years:
  - The conceptual framework developed by ECLAC of technical, operational, political and prospective (TOPP) capabilities to manage vital transformations, applied to this transformation: the care society.
  - Improvements in calculating the amount of investment needed, its costs and benefits and the need for sustainable financing.

# What is the care society?

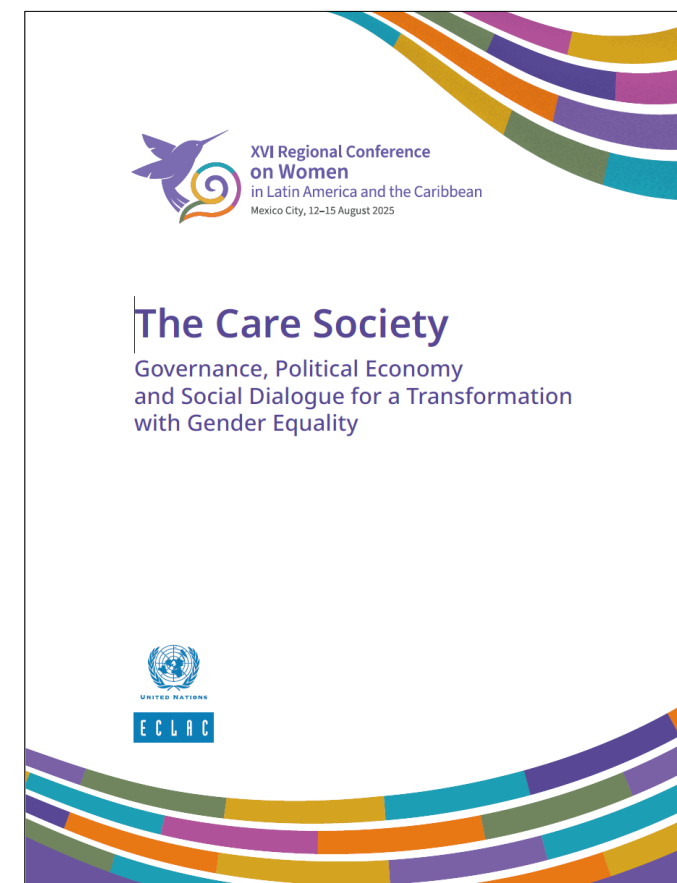
- A concept that is centred on the sustainability of life and the care of people and the planet, recognizing the synergistic interdependence among people, the environment, and economic and social development.
- It affirms the right to care: the right to give and receive care and to self-care, protecting the rights of those who receive and provide care.
- It entails redistributing power, time and resources, from an intergenerational perspective, looking towards a future with social and gender co-responsibility.



**Source:** Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. (2022). *The care society: a horizon for sustainable recovery with gender equality* (LC/CRM.15/3).

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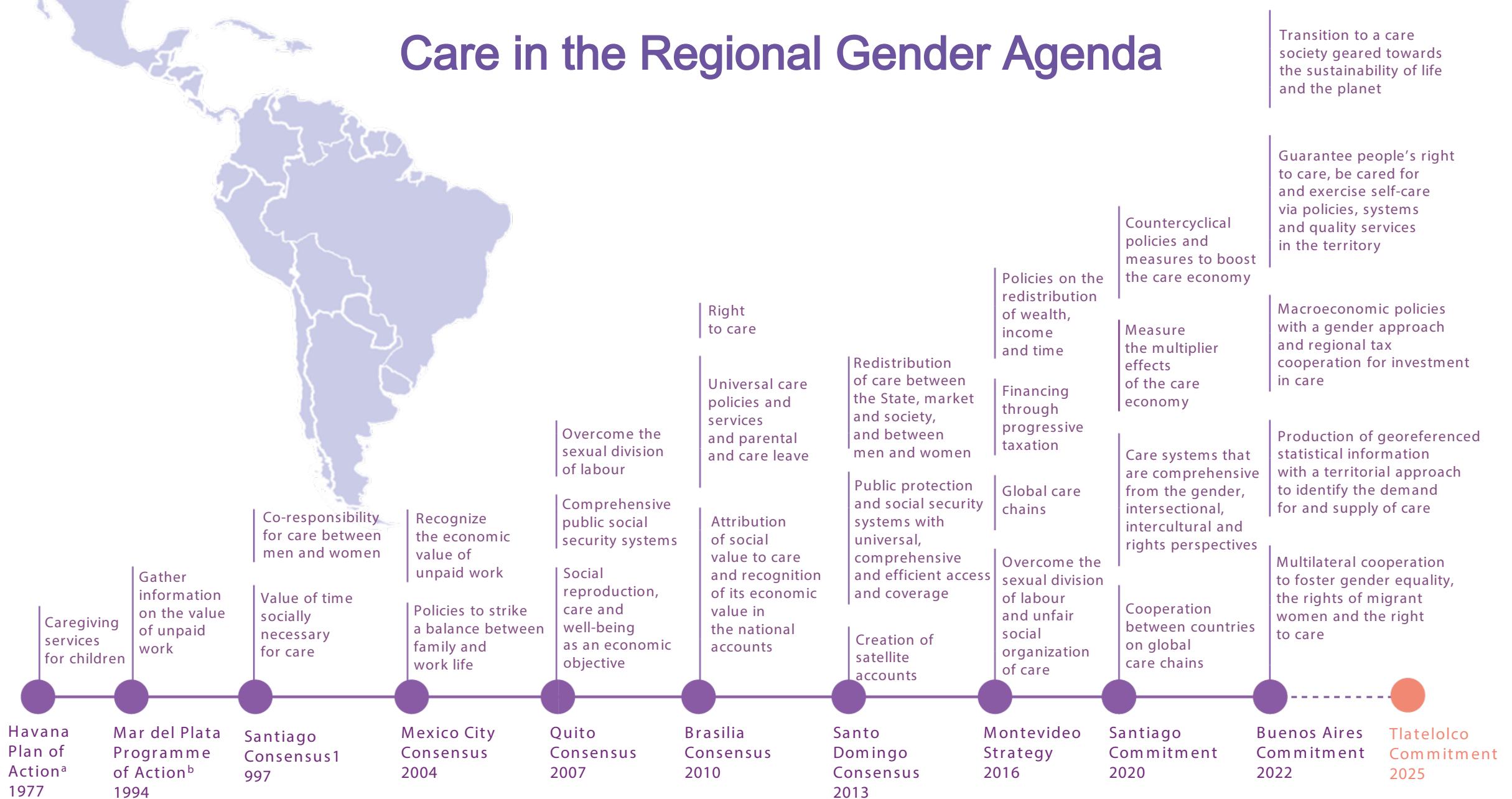
# I. A multilevel approach to care

(Global, regional and national trajectories)



# Care in the Regional Gender Agenda

Transition to a care society geared towards the sustainability of life and the planet



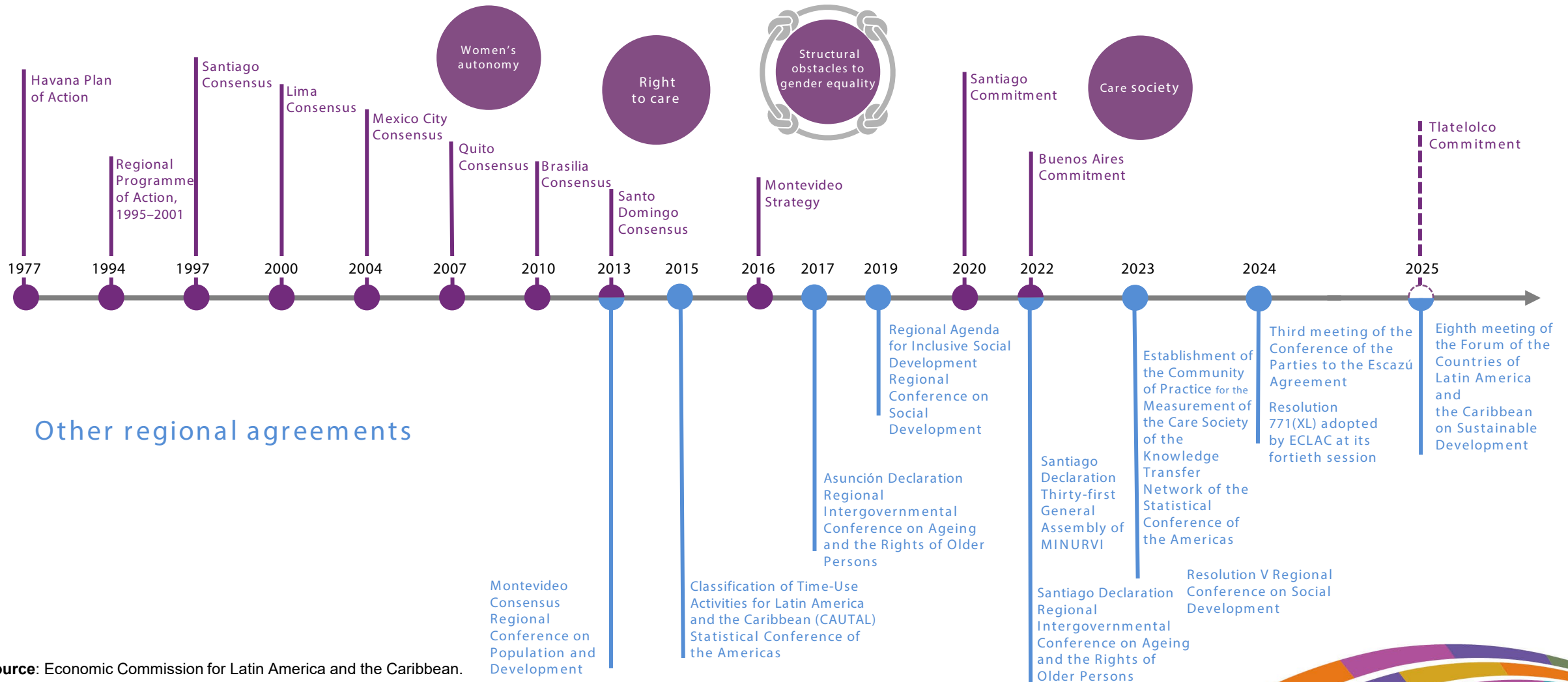
**Source:** Gúezmes García, A., Bidegain Ponte, N., and Scuro, M. L. (2023, December). Gender equality and the care society. *CEPAL Review* (141) (LC/PUB.2023/29-P). Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

<sup>a</sup> The Regional Plan of Action for the Integration of Women into Latin American Economic and Social Development.

<sup>b</sup> The Regional Programme of Action for the Women of Latin America and the Caribbean, 1995–2001.

# Care in the Regional Gender Agenda and synergy with other regional agreements

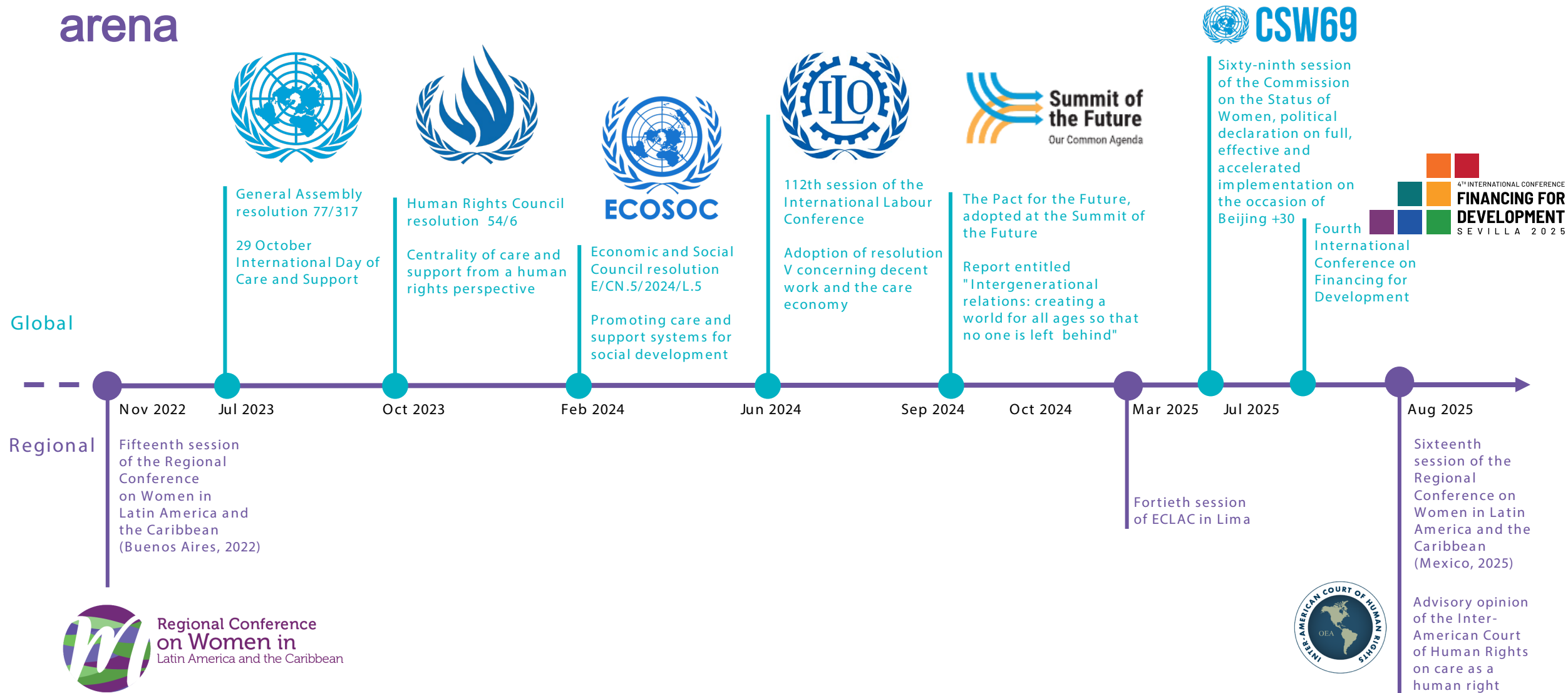
## Regional Gender Agenda



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.



# Care in the global debate and the contribution of Latin America and the Caribbean in the multilateral arena



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.



# Regulatory and statistical advances for care policies and systems

The social organization of care with equality calls for intersectoral policies that:

- Guarantee the right to care
- Advance social and gender co-responsibility
- Incorporate the 5R framework: recognize, redistribute and reduce unpaid work and promote decent work with representation and reward for workers in the care economy

8

countries

National care policies and systems

have adopted legislation establishing national care policies and systems

15

countries

Maternity leave have established maternity leave of at least 14 weeks (ILO Convention No. 183), and 5 have policies allowing for leave of at least 18 weeks

4

countries

Parental leave  
Chile, Colombia, Cuba and Uruguay have implemented paid parental leave.

24

countries

Statistics

officially measure time use

18

countries

provide data on the SDG indicator on unpaid domestic and care work

5

countries

have official satellite accounts for unpaid household work

## II. Care as a need, a right and work that drives the economy

# Care as a need, a right and work

## Care

Includes all activities that ensure human reproduction and the sustainability of life and the planet.

Is relational and implies interpersonal ties.

Is a public good that generates well-being for the population as a whole and is also a sector that drives the economy.

### Need

The demand for care will increase in the coming decades amid demographic and epidemiological shifts and the effects of climate change.

### Work

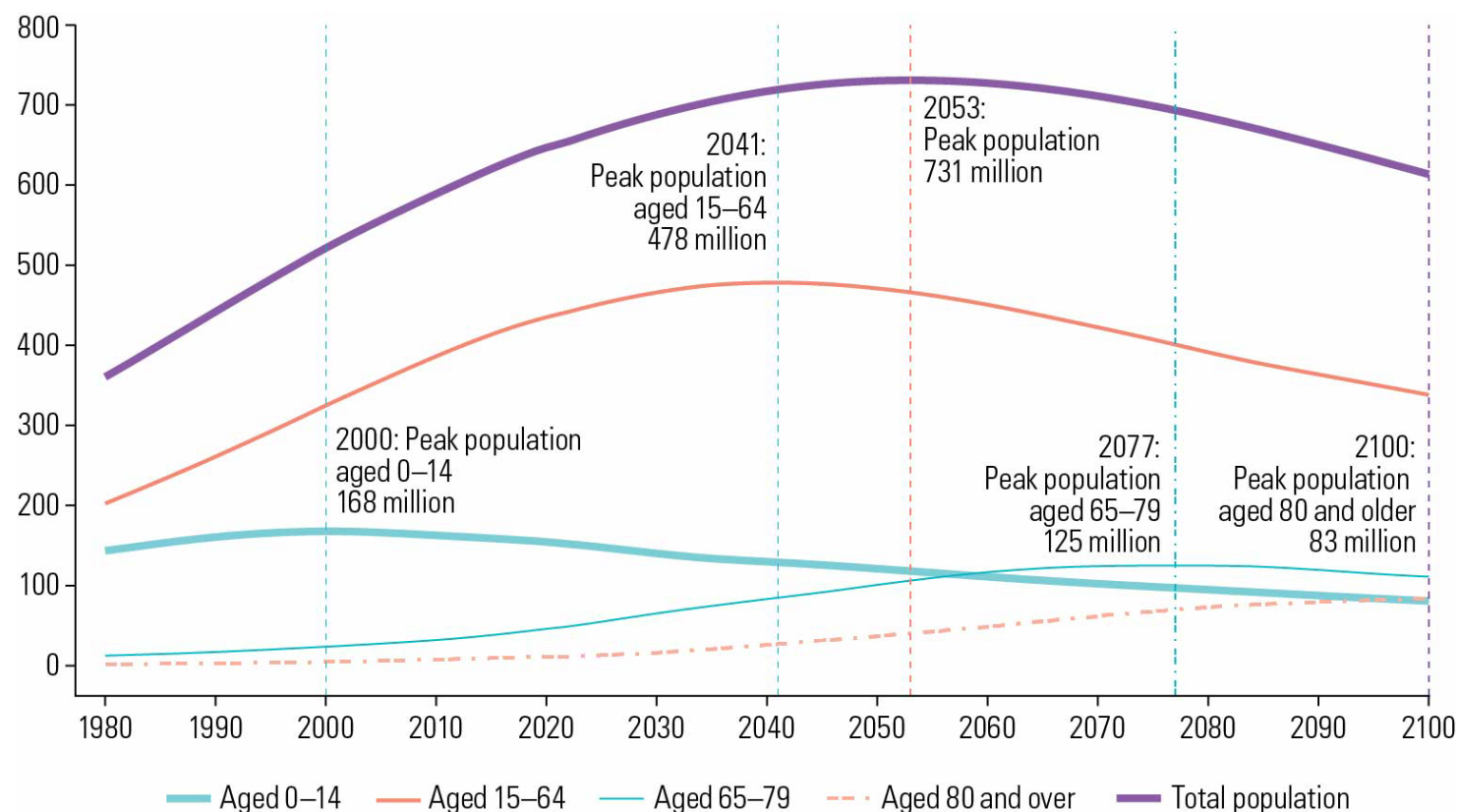
Includes the paid and unpaid work comprising the care economy.

### Right

Implies ensuring the rights of each person in the three dimensions of care (giving and receiving care and exercising self-care).

# Growing care needs for older persons are projected, while childcare needs remain unresolved

Latin America and the Caribbean (47 countries and territories): total population at mid-year, by age group, estimated and projected, 1980–2100  
(Millions of people)



- Although the child population is in decline, it remains a priority given high poverty rates and insufficient care services.
- In the region, the population aged 65 and over will double over the next 25 years to 18.9% of the total population in 2050 (138 million).
- The region is undergoing a process of ageing within ageing (with a high degree of feminization) which will generate greater and increasingly specific care needs.

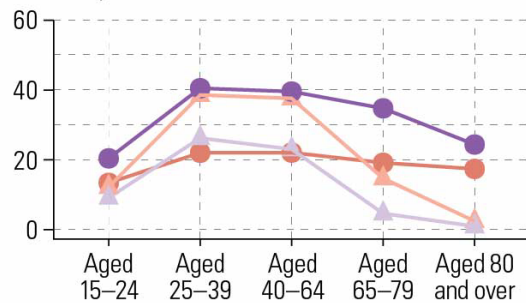
Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. (2024). Social Panorama of Latin America and the Caribbean, 2024 (LC/PUB.2024/21-P/Rev.1).

Note: The vertical dotted lines in different colours indicate the year in which the age group of the corresponding colour peaks.

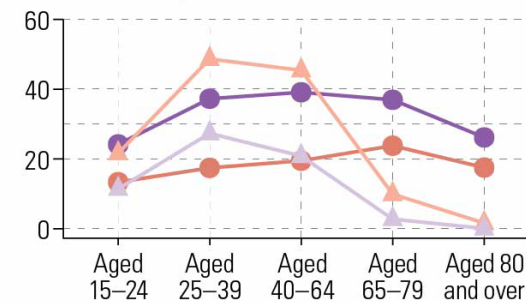
# The sexual division of labour becomes more pronounced over the course of the life cycle

Latin America (6 selected countries): time spent on paid and unpaid work, by sex and age group, most recent year with information available (Hours per week)

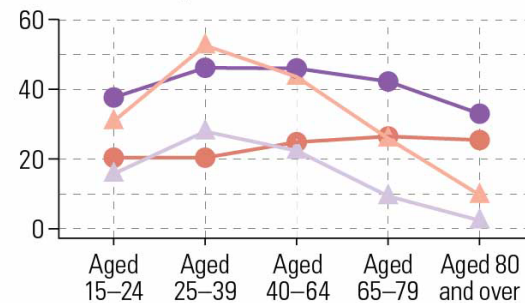
A. Chile, 2023



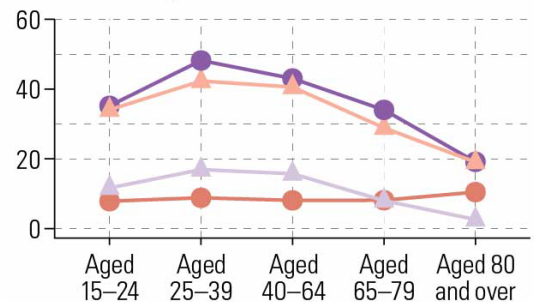
B. Costa Rica, 2022



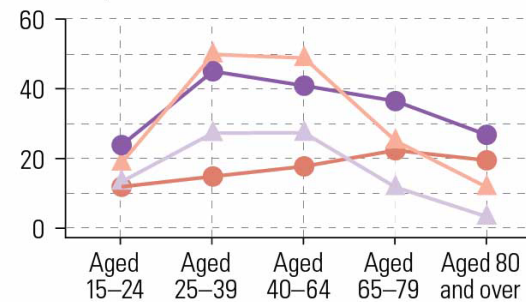
C. El Salvador, 2022



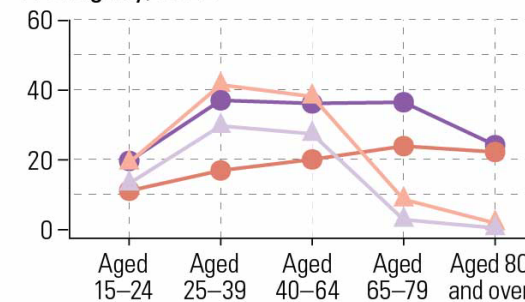
D. Guatemala, 2022



E. Peru, 2024



F. Uruguay, 2022



● Women's unpaid work
 ● Men's unpaid work
 ▲ Women's paid work
 ▲ Men's paid work

- In most countries, **women work more hours** than men overall, but primarily in unpaid activities.
- The distribution of working time is inverted between men and women: while women spend two thirds of their time on unpaid work, men dedicate only one third.
- Women's unpaid workload **exceeds 20 hours per week** consistently into old age (80 years and over).

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, on the basis of Repository on time use in Latin America and the Caribbean, Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean.

Note: The data are not strictly comparable between countries because of timing and methodological differences in the collection instruments.



# The care economy accounts for 27.4% of the region's employed women

- The sexual division of labour persists. Gender gaps exist in job quality, working hours and income.
- Paid domestic work accounts for 10.3% of women's employment in the region, yet only 24% of female domestic workers have pension coverage.

Latin America (14 countries): labour characteristics of the population aged 15 and older employed in the expanded care sector, by sex, 2023



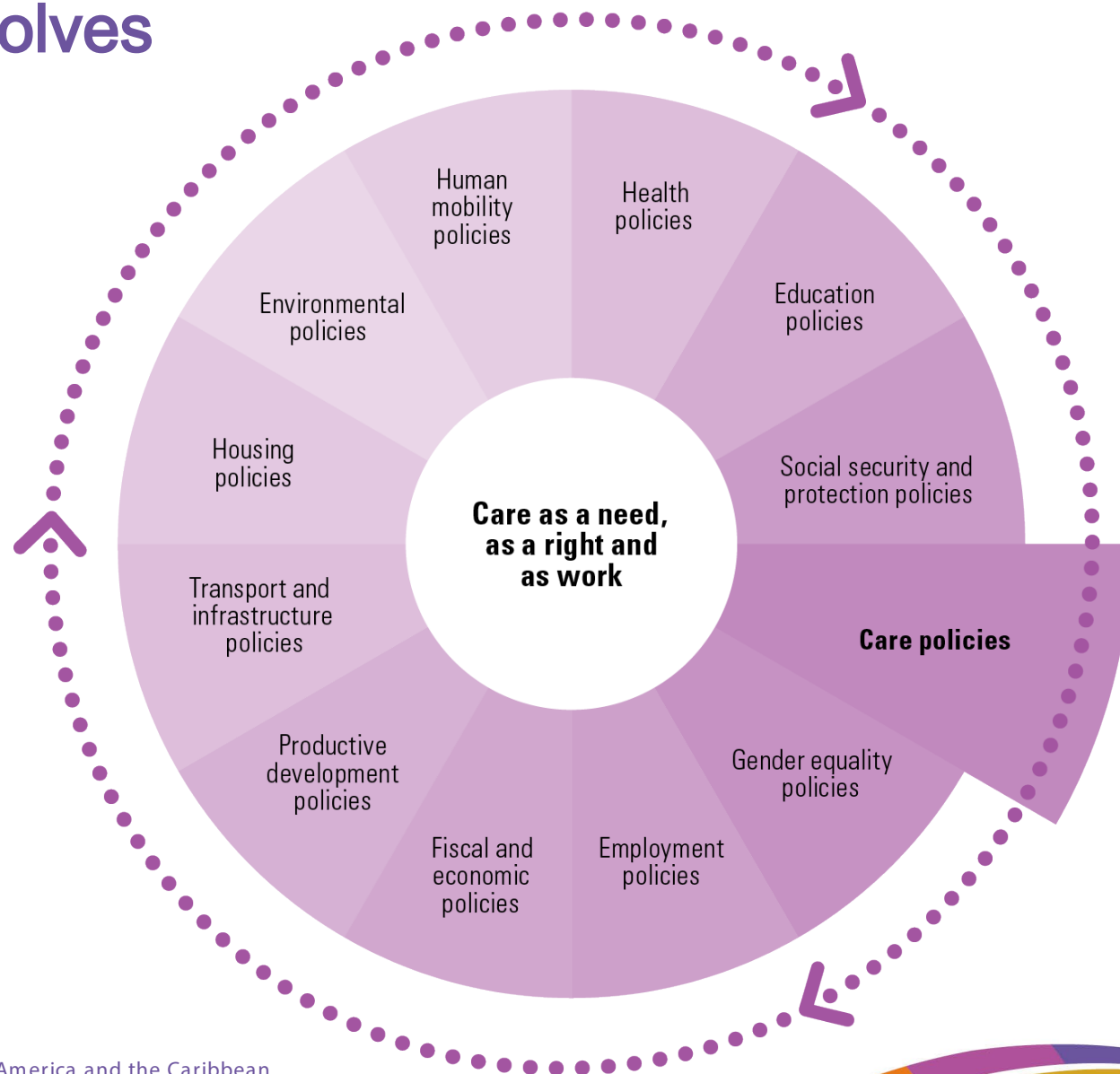
Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).



# III: The role of care in the design and implementation of public policies

# Advancing the right to care involves a wide range of public policies

- Two-track approach:  
**coordinating care policies** with other sectoral public policies, while **incorporating a care perspective** in the design and implementation of other sectoral policies.
- This cross-sectoral care approach should be consolidated in alignment with key **guiding principles**: social and gender co-responsibility, universality with progressivity, financial sustainability and a territorial and intersectional perspective.

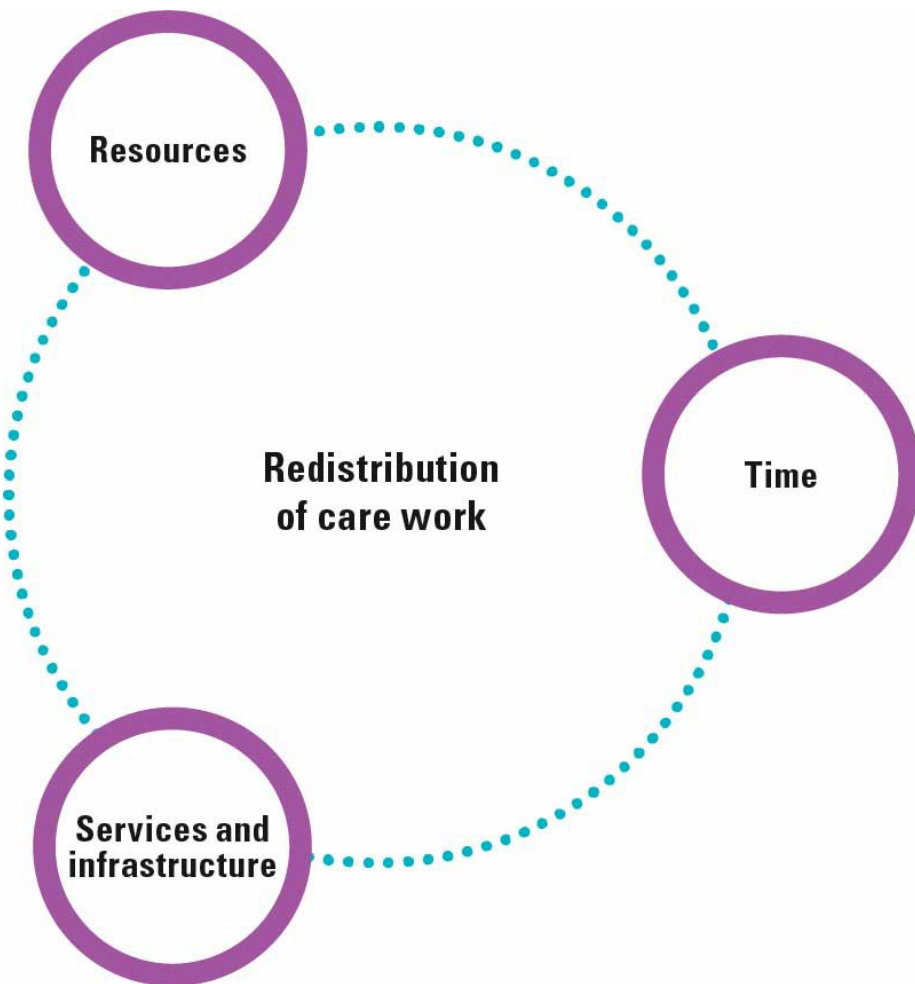


Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

# Key concepts of the care society paradigm

- **Care society:** A structural transformation that recognizes the links between the economy, society and the environment. A society that prioritizes the sustainability of life and the care of people and the planet. A new development model centred on equality, eco-dependence and human interdependence, positioning care as a need, as work and as a human right.
- **Care economy:** Encompasses paid and unpaid care work, both direct and indirect, provided within and outside households. It includes caregivers and care recipients, as well as employers and institutions involved in the provision of care.
- **Care policies:** A set of actions aimed at establishing a new social organization of care that guarantees the right to care and promotes social and gender co-responsibility. It encompasses normative frameworks, sufficient and sustainable financing, services, infrastructure, employment protection, regulation, training and information systems.
- **Care crisis:** Characterized by growing demand for care —exacerbated by population ageing and climate change— that exceeds the capacity of the available services, infrastructure and workforce. It disproportionately affects women facing multiple forms of discrimination, such as poor, rural, Indigenous and Afrodescendent women, women with disabilities, older women, migrant women or those living in territories in conflict.

# Redistribution of care work through time, resources and services and infrastructure



Care policies are a set of actions aimed at establishing a new social organization of care that can guarantee the right to care and promote social and gender co-responsibility.

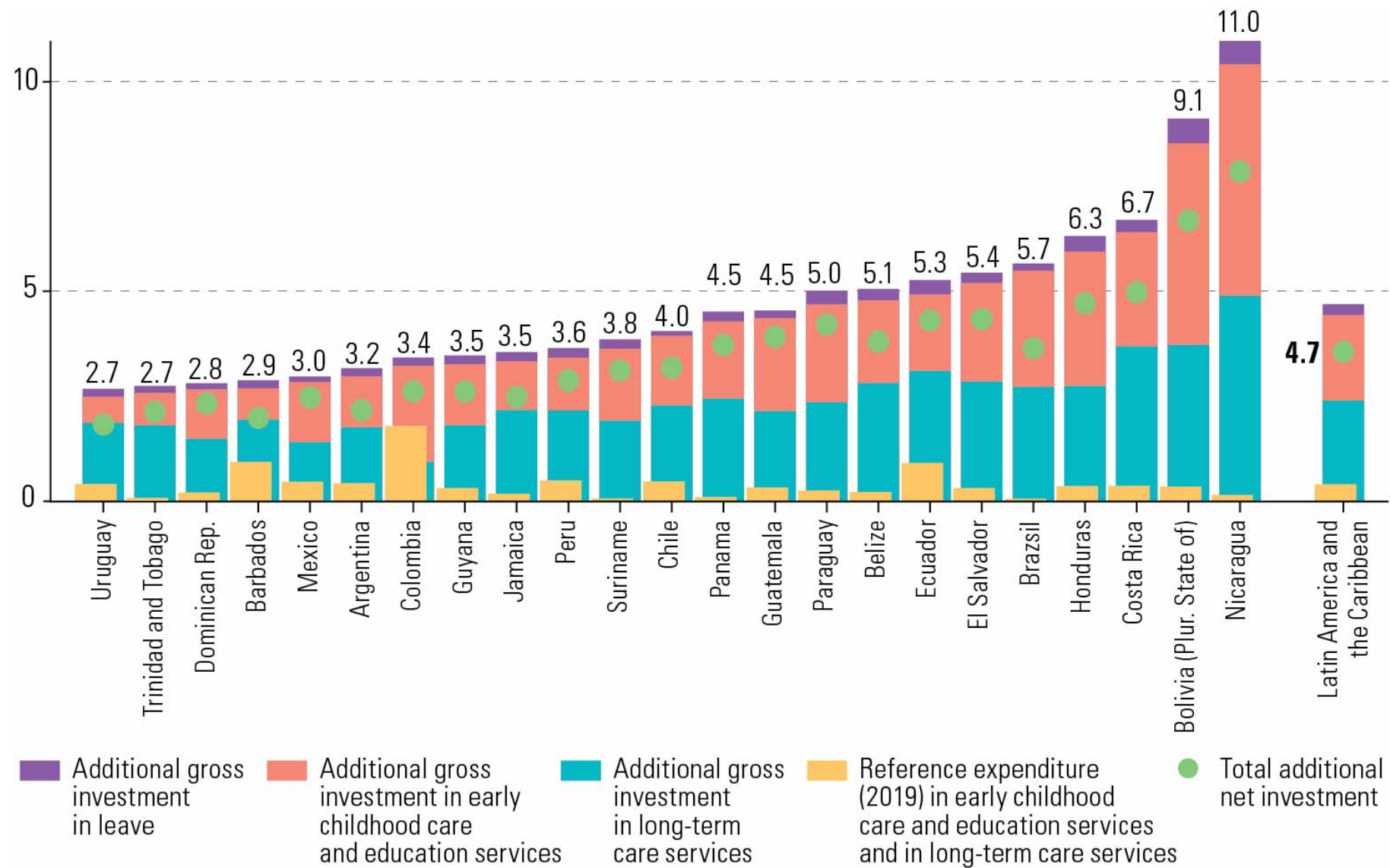
These include:

- Normative frameworks
- Sufficient and sustainable financing
- Care services and benefits
- Infrastructure
- Instruments to protect employment in the care economy
- Regulation, training and certification of care worker competencies
- Information systems

It is possible to redistribute care work through resources, time, services and infrastructure.

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

To finance care for children and older persons in line with international standards by 2035  
a progressive and gradual investment of 4.7% of GDP is needed in the following years



Latin America and the Caribbean (23 countries): Gross and net investment in leave and care services projected to 2035. (Percentages of GDP)

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, on the basis of the ILO Care Policy Investment Simulator. <https://webapps.ilo.org/globalcare/?language=en#simulator>; and CEPALSTAT <https://statistics.cepal.org/portal/cepalstat/index.html?lang=en>.

## A substantial investment, but with tremendous returns

- Creation of 31 million jobs in the 23 countries with available information, accounting for 12% of the labour force projected for 2035
- Closure of the gender gap in labour market participation, with women's employment projected to rise from 52.9% in 2019 to 63.2% in 2035
- Tax revenue offsetting an approximate 19% of investment costs
- Enormous benefits in terms of well-being, health, and training and skills-building opportunities



## IV. Emerging trends and prospective analysis of the care sector

# Forward -looking care policies are needed to navigate the trends that will reshape care in the region



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

# Growth and economic and productive transformation: what is required in terms of care?

Building the care society requires recognizing the relationship between production structures and care. In the absence of care policies, unpaid work falls to women, weakening the production system.

Low productivity, in turn, exacerbates inequality and insecurity in the labour market, increasing demand for care. The integration of care as a driver of economic growth and the assessment of production systems' effects on care are vital.



Care-centric,  
forward-looking policies  
for economic growth  
and transformation

- Incorporate care for people and the planet into social, economic and environmental standards for productive transformation
- Integrate care as a global standard in trade and value chains
  - Position care as a strategic investment in sustainable development
  - Bring care sector jobs into the formal labour market
- Ensure that care work is recognized and redistributed within production processes


# Holistically address the interrelated effects of climate change and environmental degradation on care and territories

Climate change affects care in communities and care for the planet. Alongside biodiversity loss and environmental degradation, the economic, gender and racial inequalities stemming from the unfair social organization of care are part of an interrelated crisis with uneven territorial effects.

- 
- Invest in care policies with climate emergency response elements and comprehensive systems that incorporate adaptation measures
  - Generate data, disaggregated by sex, on the care-related impacts of climate change
    - Ensure access to the economic resources needed to strengthen climate response capacities
    - Ensure that climate adaptation measures recognize the sustainable practices of Indigenous Peoples and communities
  - Design climate adaptation measures or initiatives that avoid creating new forms of exclusion
  - Prioritize women's labour inclusion in the creation of green jobs
  - Foster R+D with local teams focused on environmental and gender perspectives

# Need for a forward-looking approach to address growing demand for long-term care

Establishing and expanding long-term care policies —services, entitlements and care leave— would improve both access to services and the resources and time available to those primarily tasked with providing unpaid care for family members.




Forward-looking policies to address long-term care needs in a timely manner

- Incorporate assistive, remote care, self-management and social technologies
- Ensure sustainable financing through taxes, social security and progressive co-payments
- Strengthen training, skills certification and working conditions in the care economy
- Promote autonomy, healthy ageing and dignity in palliative care
- Implement legal and oversight mechanisms to prevent abuse, neglect and exclusion

# Care policies aligned with migration policies from a transnational perspective

The transformation of global and regional care chains in Latin America and the Caribbean has a considerable impact on the social organization of care in both origin and destination countries.

It is essential to align care policies with migration policies, addressing the multiple dimensions of care from a transnational perspective.



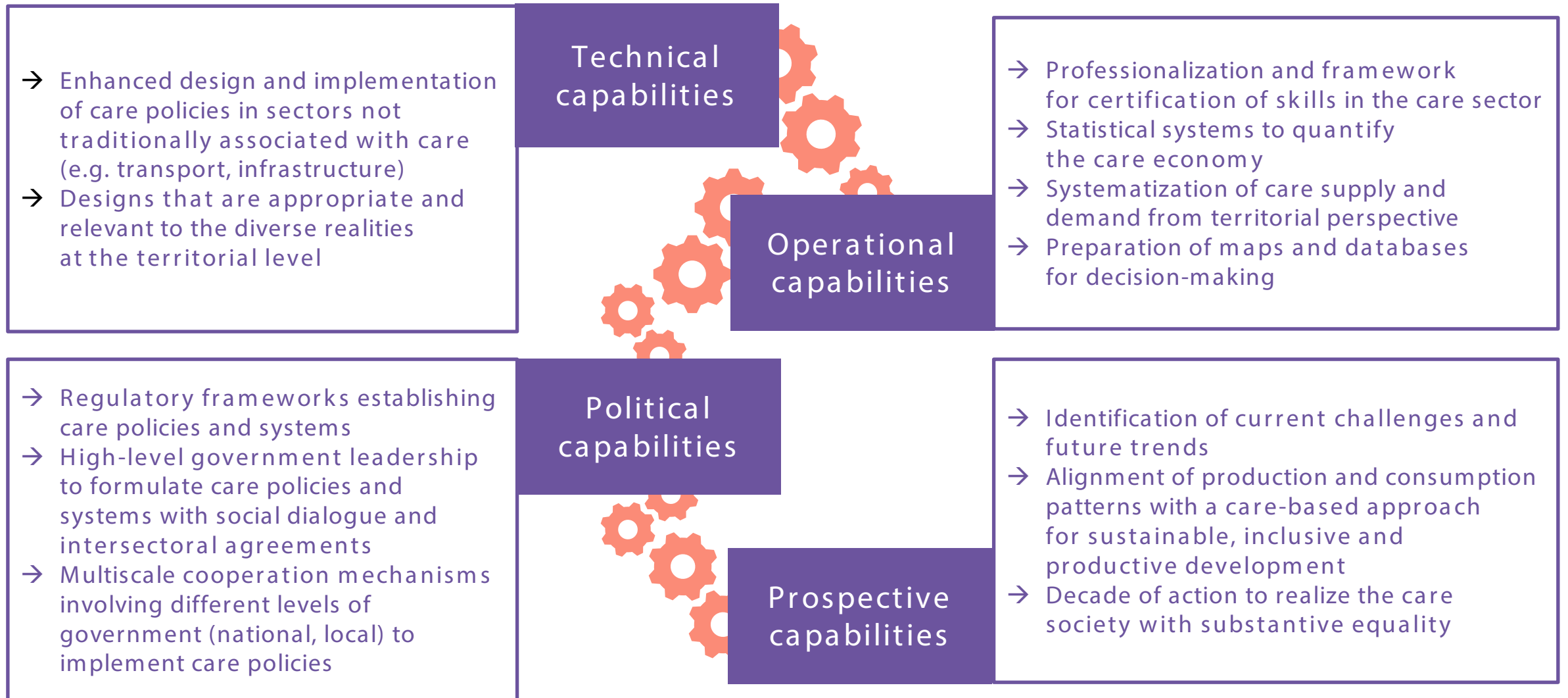
Forward-looking policies to address long-term care needs in a timely manner

- Develop the capacity to anticipate and plan for migration flows
- Promote international agreements to safeguard the rights of migrants and their access to services
- Develop mechanisms for family reunification and humanitarian visas to enable the provision of timely care
- Generate systematic data on climate-driven migration and the dynamics of care



# V. Building the care society and gender equality

# Develop technical, operational, political and prospective (TOPP) capabilities for the care society

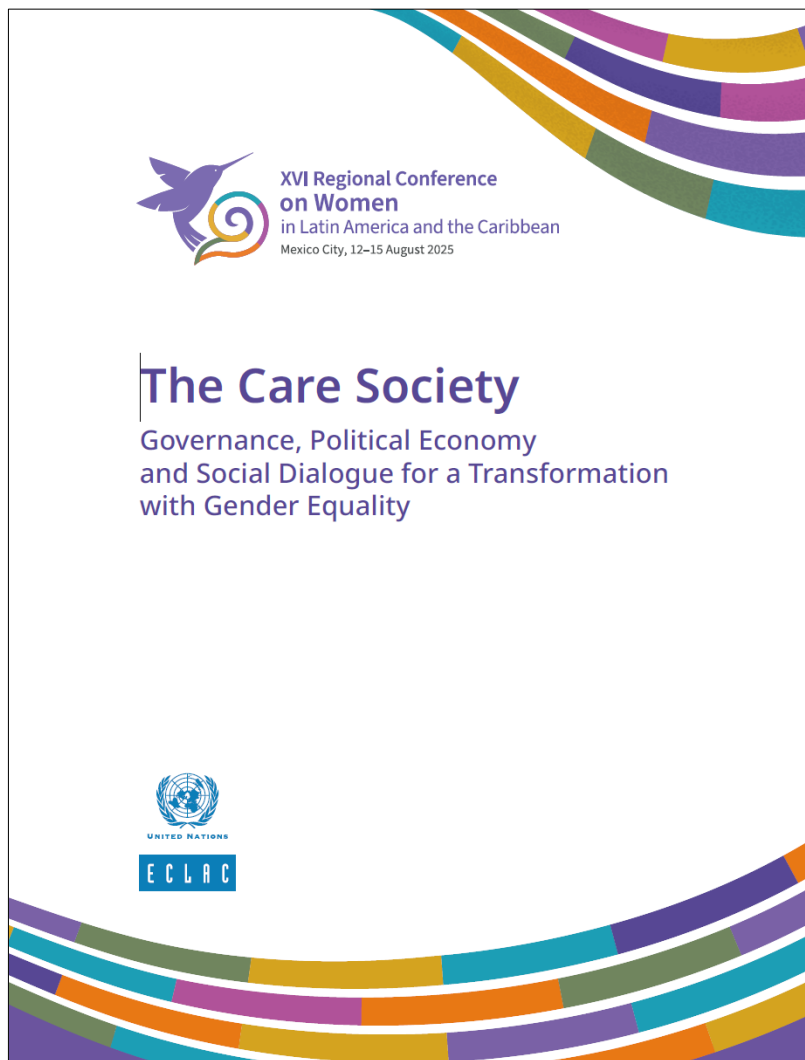


# The “hows” of steering the transformation towards the care society

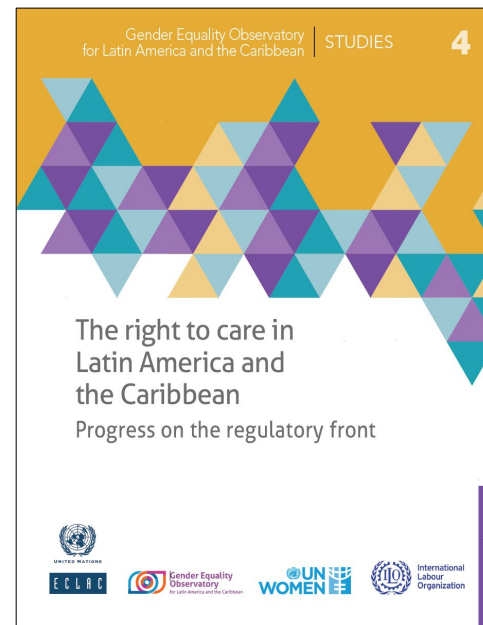
- Social dialogue to forge broad shared visions that underpin the necessary transformations
- Robust governance and institutional frameworks for care policy, with machineries for the advancement of women playing a key role.
- Foster a cultural shift that values and redistributes care among men and women and promotes social co-responsibility to overcome discriminatory patriarchal patterns.
- Adequate financial resource mobilization, even when fiscal space is limited, should be understood as a strategic investment that will continue to deliver returns.
- Breaking the statistical silence through fortified information systems that measure the value of care and assess implemented policies.

## Concluding remarks: a call for a decade of action

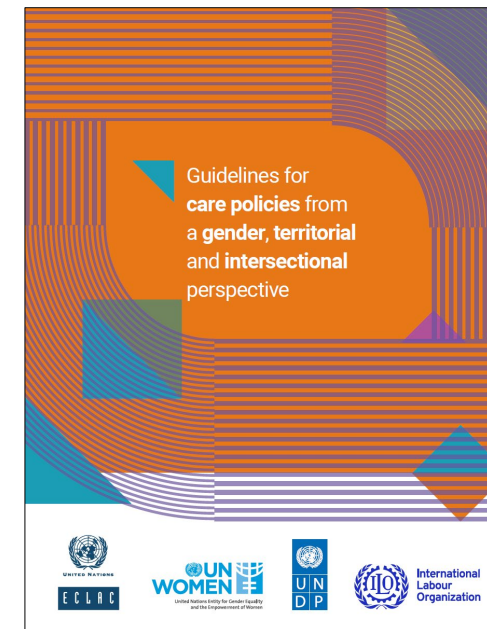
- Care must be recognized as a need, a right, as work that can drive the economy as a whole and as a global public good.
- Advancing the care society calls for action and for a more inclusive, productive and sustainable future, where care for people and the planet is at the centre of public policies, across all sectors and at all levels of government and branches of the State.
- Latin America and the Caribbean is calling for a decade of action to accelerate the achievement of substantive gender equality and the care society.
- This is an urgent and unequivocal call: acting now will sow the seeds of hope for future generations and ensure that care, in all its forms, is recognized as the foundation of a more just society.



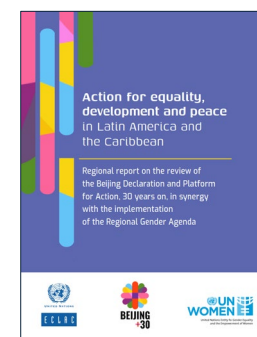
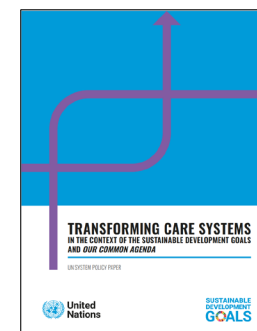
Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. (2025). The Care Society: Governance, Political Economy and Social Dialogue for a Transformation with Gender Equality (LC/CRM.16/3).



Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and International Labour Organization. (2025). The right to care in Latin America and the Caribbean: progress on the regulatory front. Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean. Studies (4) (LC/PUB.2025/9-P)



Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, United Nations Development Programme and International Labour Organization. (2025). Guidelines for care policies from a gender, territorial and intersectional perspective (LC/CRM.16/4).



# Thank you

**ECLAC Gender Affairs Division**

<https://www.cepal.org/en/work-areas/gender-affairs>



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