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## **International Organisation of Employers (IOE) response to the OHCHR *Call for Input: Human Rights Council resolution 54/6 on the centrality of care and support from a human rights perspective.***

### **Background**

The care economy is central to humanity, embracing all life stages. It represents the backbone of the workforce and a key element in building a sustainable community. According to the WHO, women account for 67% of health and care workers worldwide, yet unpaid and undervalued care activities continue to hinder women's socioeconomic and political opportunities and participation in society. Perhaps combined factors, such as the ongoing socioeconomic crisis, the disproportionate burdens on the shoulders of women imposed by the global COVID-19 pandemic, and significant changes in the world of work, all may have led to a renewed call for attention to the care economy. The concerted efforts of civil society entities, the ILO, UN Women, and other stakeholders on recognising, redistributing, and valuing unpaid and paid care have made this issue central to many discussions. The decision of the United Nations General Assembly to introduce the International Day of Care and Support in 2023, a significant milestone, seems to have galvanized a call for action. Therefore, this call can no longer be dismissed since a significant number of issues related to women's economic empowerment and gender equality hinge on it, such as decent work, work of equal pay for work of equal value, education, career, and economic opportunities for women, to name a few.

Addressing care and support from a human rights perspective entails analyzing the underlying root causes and impacts at stake and the most impacted groups. In the world of work, data from ILO, OECD and WEF continue to demonstrate that women's employment rate is lower than men's due to several factors ranging from lack of access to jobs to unbalanced care responsibilities and lack of access and affordable childcare options. In addition, data from GEM, in 2022, highlight that "*women were 43% more likely than men to report family reasons for business exit*"<sup>1</sup> due to a higher burden on family care responsibilities they shoulder around the globe. As such, despite the positive strides women have made in attaining education,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gemconsortium.org/reports/womens-entreneurship>

including surpassing men in the OECD region on higher education, women's progress in employment and entrepreneurial activities may be slow largely due to external constraints rather than their professional capacity and skills when considering segmentation. While women bear the brunt of unpaid care work, they also represent the largest percentage of workers worldwide in the care sector, according to ILO. However, despite this overwhelming representation, jobs in this sector are typically perceived as low paid while being essential to the economy in supporting the workforce and positively impacting productivity, work-life balance, attraction, and talent retention, to name a few. Lack of access to affordable and reliable care is a significant hindrance towards increasing the labour market participation of women, thus contributing to the persistent gender disparities in the workforce and economic loss. As care plays a vital role in the sustainability of economies and the well-being of societies, its importance is growing. Although care may represent a cost to the budget, as pointed out by ILO, the care sector has the potential to create new jobs in the economy where investment in parental leave, universal childcare and long-term care services could generate up to 299 million jobs by 2035.<sup>2</sup>

## **Contribution**

Considering the inputs request for the OHCHR call on resolution 54/6 and the work of the International Organization of Employers (IOE), we would like to take this opportunity to underscore the following four points as our contribution to this initiative:

First, IOE supports a call to Member States to invest in the care economy, thus creating/or strengthening a viable and sustainable infrastructure that can respond to care needs in the community. In today's fast-paced economy, businesses thrive in environments that foster employee engagement and productivity. Crucially, this entails having robust care infrastructure, and high quality, accessible, available, and affordable care services. Such provisions are essential components to ensure all employees, particularly women, can join, remain, and stay highly engaged in their professional sector and where employers can have a talent pool of individuals ready and available to work. In a rapidly evolving economy, readiness to work is crucial for both employers and employees. However, barriers related to inadequate care structures often prevent women from entering paid employment. According

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<sup>2</sup> ILO (2022) Care at Work: Investing in care leave and services for a more gender-equal world of work.

to the ILO, 647 million full-time unpaid caregivers (of which 606 million are women and 41 million are men) are not seeking a job due to their caring responsibilities<sup>3</sup>. This vast number represents a significant untapped pool of potential employees, presenting a challenge to employers striving to fill job vacancies. Comprehensive access to services can also contribute towards ensuring the participation of diverse groups of caregivers in the labour market, thus supporting the inclusion of groups such as migrant women who are often juggling caregiving duties with their own family need of care services.

Second, women's career and entrepreneurship opportunities can be hindered by the lack of reliable, accessible, and affordable child and elderly care services and the imbalance of unpaid care work predominantly falling on women globally. To respond to the slow progress of women's inclusion in the labour market, IOE echoes the need to enhance the provision of support services based on a reliable care infrastructure. Dialogue and the pooling-in of resources with local authorities responsible for establishing care infrastructure responsive to employees' needs is welcomed by employers and businesses alike.

Third, IOE supports the aim of a well-structured care economy that empowers employees to balance their work responsibilities with caregiving duties – an imperative that cannot be overstated. Employees with access to quality childcare, family leave, and flexible working arrangements are more productive and engaged. This also enables businesses to retain top talent to drive innovation and productivity, all elements which contribute to a healthy economy, as underscored by businesses. Paid maternity, paternity, parental leave, and sustainable social protection schemes are essential cornerstones of a supportive and equitable workplace environment, and these policies should accommodate the diverse operational contexts of enterprises across all sizes and sectors. SMEs' diverse realities need to be considered when designing care policies and developing or strengthening care infrastructure and services. In addition, there is a need to facilitate the transition from informality to formal work in the care economy through burden-free administrative systems and procedures enabling caregivers and employers to engage easily while contributing to the economy and sustainable social protection schemes.

Fourth, IOE echoes the ILO/EPIC call to promote the essential role of care and support in all societies and economies and ensure that decent work for care workers is standard practice. In

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms\\_633166.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_633166.pdf)

addition, we welcome a social dialogue at the enterprise level towards a better understanding of the challenges of care responsibilities and cooperation with local authorities to find viable solutions, such as pooling resources to create or strengthen care services. We welcome the role of Member States in developing and implementing care policies within the spirit of social dialogue, where beneficiaries and employees are included. Businesses would undoubtedly welcome guidance and information from governments, for example, from local town halls or at the federal level, on where to go when there is a strong demand for care services. Employer organizations can play a significant role in disseminating and sharing information about care services and advocating for secure local or regional funding. In addition, employers' organizations can advocate for policies and regulations that promote the development of a robust and sustainable care infrastructure. This includes advocating for supportive policies such as flexible working arrangements, access to quality childcare and eldercare services, etc.