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► **Care at work**

Investing in care leave and services
for a more gender equal world of work

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INTERNATIONAL LABOUR OFFICE GENEVA

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Care at work: Investing in care leave and services for a more gender equal world of work

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► Preface

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing gender inequalities in the labour market and the imbalance between women and men regarding housework and family responsibilities. The additional care demands on women's time has forced many to quit paid work altogether, making their re-entry into the labour market even more challenging as economies and societies recover from the pandemic. The latter has exposed the urgent need to address the unequal share of unpaid care work between women and men and between families and the State, and has underlined the importance of investing in an ecosystem of transformative care policies. This is to the benefit of workers (both women and men), children, businesses, societies and the planet; since making the right to care and to be cared for a reality for all has overarching implications for the sustainability of humanity.

Investing in care is central to the *ILO Declaration for the Future of Work* and the *Global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient*. Both have been endorsed by governments and employers' and workers' organizations from all over the world, and are grounded on international labour standards. "Large-scale investment in the care economy" is also a key transformative measure of the UN Secretary-General's *Our Common Agenda*. It is also central to the UN Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transition initiative to accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals through the creation of decent jobs, primarily in the green and care economies, and by extending social protection floors to people currently not covered by any social protection by 2030. As of March 2022, the ILO and over 50 other members joined the Global Alliance for Care, spearheaded by the National Institute of Women of Mexico in alliance with UN Women to advance global and national care work agendas.

As a contribution to the implementation of these ambitious agendas, this report provides a comprehensive comparative analysis of national legal provisions on maternity protection and care leave and services for workers with family responsibilities in over 180 countries around the world. Based on legal information collected by the ILO, the report offers an overview of progress and challenges in delivering transformative care policies, paying attention to the capacity of national legislation to acknowledge care policies' provisions for categories of workers that are typically excluded from coverage, such as the self-employed, workers in the informal economy, and adoptive and LGBTIQ+ parents.

Through a comprehensive and unique macrosimulation, the report also shows that investing in care policies holds the potential to generate decent work in care sectors, strengthen social protection systems, and close long-standing gender gaps at work and at home that were exacerbated by the pandemic.

There will be no full, gender-equal, sustainable and inclusive recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic without serious investments in transformative care policy packages. This is the main message of this report, which we hope will not remain unheard.

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