



STATEMENT

First G20 Working Group Meeting on Women's Empowerment | IEJ Statement

18 February 2025

The following statement was read as the IEJ's contribution during the first G20 Women's Empowerment Working Group meeting on Monday, 17 February 2025 at DIRCO.

South Africa's G20 Presidency comes at a critical moment, as the world grapples with overlapping crises—from climate change and economic underdevelopment to inequality, poverty, and geopolitical instability. Addressing these challenges requires bold, transformative policies that promote inclusive and sustainable development. The Institute for Economic Justice (IEJ) fully supports the South African government's commitment to this agenda, guided by the principles of Solidarity, Equality, and Sustainability.

A key priority in this effort, that the IEJ aims to support, is the recognition of care as the bedrock of society. Ensuring that care work is valued and supported is essential for achieving equitable and sustainable development. The inclusion of care in the Empowerment of Women Working Group marks a significant step forward, but it must be fully leveraged as a strategic opportunity to address its systemic undervaluation, integrate care into economic policy, and ensure its fair distribution and support. This provides a rare opportunity to embed care into evidence-based policymaking and advance the realisation of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 5.4, which calls for recognising and valuing unpaid care and domestic work through investments in public services, infrastructure, and social protection policies.

We are currently facing a global care crisis of unprecedented scale, making it increasingly difficult for individuals, families, and communities to balance paid work and unpaid care often resulting in poor physical, mental, and social outcomes. Structural inequalities, exposed and worsened by the Covid-19 pandemic, have left care regimes fragile and neglected, disproportionately burdening women—especially those in low-income communities. While the pandemic caused immense loss, it also revealed the urgency to strengthen care infrastructures. However, nearly five years after the pandemic, care remains undervalued, underpaid, and largely absent from economic policy.

Globally, it is women who bear the brunt of this neglect. In South Africa, [women still perform over 75% of unpaid care work](#). This work plugs systemic gaps in infrastructural and social support. In addition, two-thirds of paid care workers are women - taking on work that is often defined by poor terms of employment and low pay. This unequal burden, whether it be more hours spent on care in the household or long shifts of domestic workers, deepens economic and social inequalities. The demand for care is only growing. One of the most significant demographic shifts of the 21st century is population ageing, which is affecting almost every country, including South Africa. This trend poses profound challenges for healthcare systems, household structures, and the economy.

To address these challenges in a lasting and sustained way, the IEJ can provide evidence-based policy solutions that elevate the visibility of care and ensure its integration into economic and policy frameworks. This includes advocating for its inclusion across working groups and thematic areas within the G20 agenda. As part of this effort and to advance a contextually embedded approach to the care economy, the Institute for Economic Justice proposes a high-level event, titled: *African Perspectives on Care: Rethinking Economies for Inclusion and Sustainability*. This event will contextualise care within Africa's socio-economic context and develop locally-driven policy solutions that respond to regional caregiving structures and historical legacies.

South Africa's G20 Presidency presents a pivotal opportunity to fully integrate the care economy into global policy agendas. As we charter uncertain waters, navigating increasing economic instability and the intensifying climate crisis, resilient care regimes are more essential than ever. With adequate support, care can be an enabler, not an inhibitor, of economic development and social inclusion. The Institute for Economic Justice (IEJ) remains committed to advancing this priority through rigorous research and advocacy, ensuring that care is firmly embedded in economic decision-making and recognised as a cornerstone of sustainable and inclusive growth.

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The Institute for Economic Justice (IEJ) is a progressive economic policy think tank committed to advancing economic justice, systemic change, and the equitable distribution of resources to ensure rights realisation and planetary wellbeing.

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