



Parliament's Role in Responding to Demographic and Development Challenges

Parliament plays a central role in shaping how countries respond to demographic, economic, and social changes. Through legislation, budget approval, oversight, and accountability, parliamentarians influence how national priorities are translated into action and how public resources are allocated.

These responsibilities are becoming increasingly complex. Population shifts, evolving care needs, and persistent fiscal pressures require parliamentarians to balance immediate priorities with long-term investments in human capital, social protection, and fiscal sustainability.

Care is directly relevant to these responsibilities. Care

systems influence labor force participation, productivity, human capital development, and future public expenditure needs. Investments in care can expand the labor force, strengthen productivity, and broaden the tax base, making care not only a social issue but also a fiscal and economic policy issue that deserves greater attention in legislative and budgetary decision-making.

This brief demonstrates why care matters for parliamentary action and how parliamentarians can use legislation, budget approval, oversight, and accountability to strengthen care systems, improve public investment, and support long-term development.

Care Is an Economic Infrastructure

Investing in care creates a chain of benefits for the economy and public finances.



Like roads, bridges, and electricity, care services are public infrastructure that supports economic growth and long-term fiscal sustainability.

Why Care Systems Matter

Parliamentarians routinely approve investments in roads, energy, water, schools, and health facilities because these support economic activity, productivity, and long-term development. Yet every economy depends equally on care infrastructure – the services, systems, and institutions that enable care needs to be met and allow people to participate in education, employment, and economic life.

Care is economic infrastructure because it supports the people on whom all other infrastructure depends. Roads connect people to jobs, but care enables them to take those jobs. Schools develop skills, but care ensures children are healthy and able to learn. Health facilities treat illness, but care sustains well-being beyond those facilities. Without care, the benefits of other public investments cannot be fully realized.

Care needs exist in every society and must be met through some combination of households, markets, communities, and public services. When care services and infrastructure are inadequate, households absorb the gap through unpaid care work – performed predominantly by women and girls – reducing labor

force participation, educational attainment, and productivity. These effects weaken economic growth, public revenues, and limit the fiscal space available to finance development priorities.

For parliamentarians, this means that investments in care are investments in economic performance as well as social well-being. Strengthening care systems can expand labor force participation, support productivity, and improve the long-term sustainability of public finances.

Recognizing care as economic infrastructure has important implications for legislation, budgeting, and oversight. Just as parliament invests in physical infrastructure to support economic development, it can help strengthen the systems that support the people who drive that development. Integrating care into legislative and budgetary processes can help ensure that public investments respond to demographic realities, strengthen economic participation, and contribute to long-term fiscal sustainability and inclusive growth.

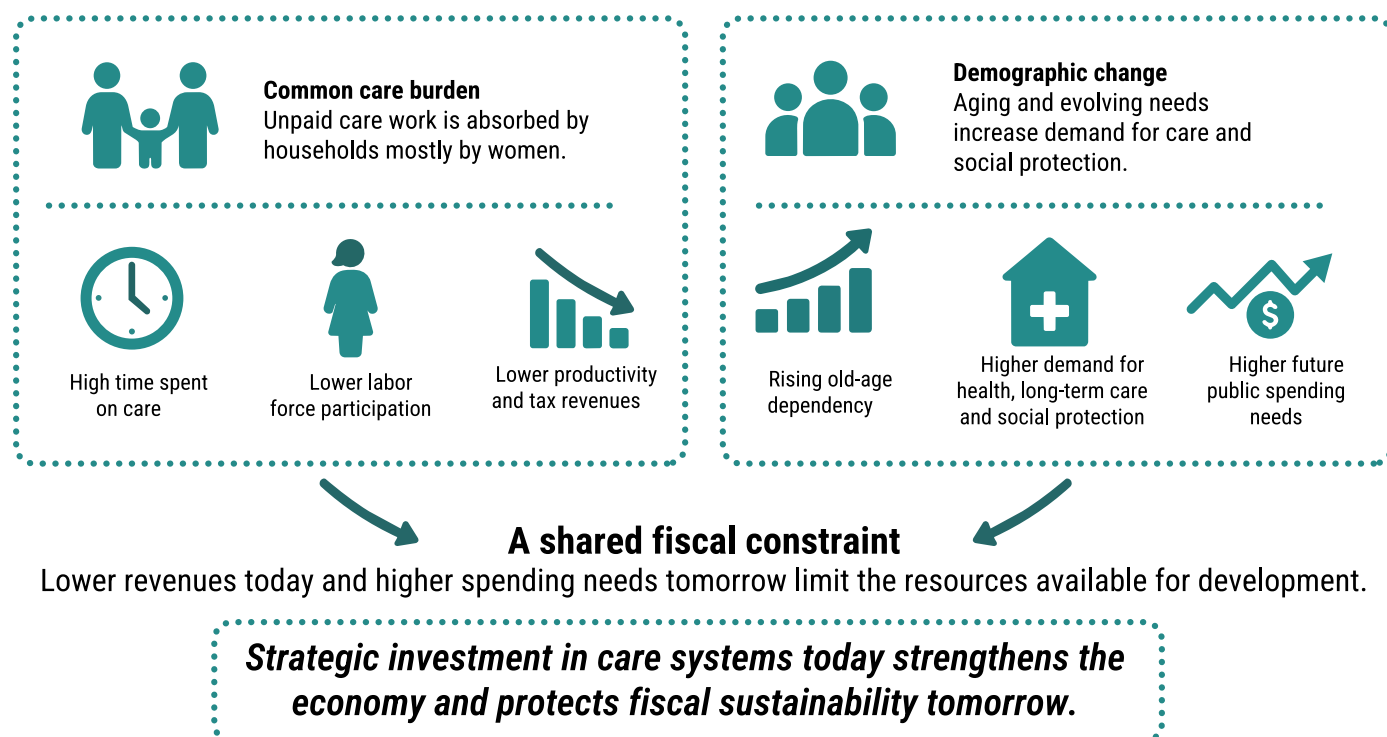
Key Evidence Relevant to Parliamentarians

Unpaid care work contributes significantly to productivity and household wellbeing, yet remains largely excluded from GDP estimates, budgeting processes, and fiscal frameworks^{1,2} – meaning that an important driver of economic activity is often invisible in the evidence used to inform public investment and fiscal planning.

Two interconnected pressures are intensifying this challenge for public finances

Two pressures, one fiscal constraint

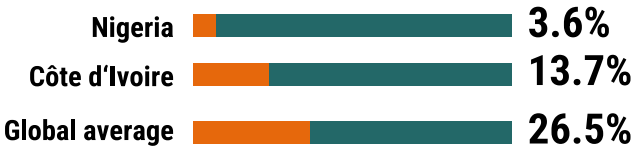
Care responsibilities today and demographic change tomorrow both drive higher demands on public finances.



Care responsibilities can also affect who participates in civic and political life.³

In Ghana, women have historically faced exclusion from district assemblies, including in the West Gonja and Lambussie-Karni districts and occupy less than one-fifth of local council seats across much of the region.⁴ While women’s underrepresentation has multiple causes, extensive caregiving responsibilities can limit the time available for civic engagement and leadership, influencing whose perspectives are represented in legislative debates, budget decisions, and policy priorities. For parliamentarians, this reinforces that care is not only a social issue, but also an economic, fiscal, and governance issue that affects both who makes decisions and the outcomes those decisions produce.

Women’s Representation in Parliament
Share of parliamentary seats held by women



Care responsibilities can limit time available for civic engagement and leadership.

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), Women in Parliament 2024

What This Means for Parliamentarians

For parliamentarians, care is not simply a social policy concern. Investments in childcare, eldercare, and disability support influence how people participate in the economy: when care needs are inadequately supported, unpaid care responsibilities can limit labor force participation, constrain productivity, and reduce public revenues. As demographic change reshapes care needs and future expenditure requirements, these pressures on legislative, budgetary, and oversight decisions are intensifying. Legislative frameworks that fail to recognize care may overlook structural barriers that constrain economic participation and reduce the effectiveness of public investments.

Through legislation, budget approval, oversight, and accountability, parliamentarians can ensure that

care systems receive sustained policy attention and adequate public investment. Decisions about childcare, health, social protection, transport, water, and other care-related services shape economic participation, productivity, and future fiscal pressures.

Care is therefore connected to the core functions of parliament. By ensuring that care-related challenges and opportunities are reflected in laws, budgets, and oversight processes, parliamentarians can strengthen economic participation, improve the effectiveness of public spending, and ensure that development strategies respond to the realities experienced by their electorates.

Priority Actions

- 1

Promote legislation that strengthens care services, infrastructure, and enabling policy frameworks – including parental leave, flexible work arrangements, and caregiver protections – to reduce barriers to economic participation and support human capital development.
- 2

Integrate care into budget review and approval processes through finance and sectoral committees, recognizing its implications for labor markets, public services, and infrastructure, and ensuring that budget decisions reflect demographic realities, and future expenditure pressures.
- 3

Apply care-sensitive budgeting approaches, including Budgeting Sensitive to the Demographic Dividend (BSDD) to assess whether budget allocations respond to demographic change, future care needs, and long-term development priorities.
- 4

Strengthen oversight of care-related programs through committee reviews, hearings, and expenditure tracking across childcare, healthcare, water, transport, and social protection to improve accountability and the effectiveness of public investments.
- 5

Use care-related evidence, evaluations, and expert testimony in parliamentary and committee deliberations to ensure that legislation and budgets reflect care needs, labor supply constraints, and future fiscal pressures.
- 6

Monitor demographic trends and their fiscal implications by engaging planning agencies, finance ministries, and national statistical offices to anticipate future care needs and expenditure priorities.

Why This Matters Now

Parliament has a central role in ensuring that legislation, budgets, and oversight processes recognize care as a driver of inclusive growth, productivity, and long-term development – a role that is becoming increasingly important as demographic change, urbanization, and evolving care needs place growing pressure on households, public services, and government budgets.

Recognizing and investing in care systems is essential for economic growth, fiscal sustainability, gender equality, and social cohesion. Decisions made today will shape future labor force participation, productivity, public revenues, and expenditure needs – and timely investment can strengthen economic resilience and reduce long-term fiscal pressures.

The challenge is no longer whether care matters, but how it is reflected in legislation, budgets, and oversight. Governments are already advancing agendas related to employment, social protection, gender equality, and the demographic dividend. Parliamentarians can ensure these commitments are reflected in legislation, budget priorities, and accountability.

A critical policy window exists for parliamentarians to strengthen care systems – and to help countries prepare for future care needs, strengthen human capital, and support sustainable development.

Future fiscal obligations are being shaped by the decisions Parliament makes today.

Learn More

Explore the full reference report, companion policy briefs developed for different audiences, and additional materials.



[Elevating Unpaid Care Work as a Policy Priority in Francophone West and Central Africa.](#) [More information about PRB's work on care](#)



(in English)



(en Français)

Explore Data and Analytical Tools



[National Transfer Accounts \(NTA\)-Country Briefs.](#)

Tracks economic production, consumption, and transfers across age groups.



[National Time Transfer Accounts \(NTTA\)](#)

Measures unpaid care and household work across generations.



[Budgeting Sensitive to Demographic Dividend](#)

Assesses whether budgets support demographic dividend priorities.



[Demographic Dividend Monitoring Index](#)

Tracks a country's readiness to achieve a demographic dividend.



[ILO-Measuring Unpaid Domestic and Care Work.](#)

Measures unpaid care and domestic work.

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1 United Nations. Transforming Care Systems in the Context of the Sustainable Development Goals and Our Common Agenda. UN System Policy Paper. New York: United Nations, 2024. https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/FINAL_UN%20System%20Care%20Policy%20Paper_24June2024.pdf
2 International Labour Organization (ILO). "Measuring Unpaid Domestic and Care Work." ILOSTAT. Accessed May 22, 2026. <https://ilostat ilo.org/topics/unpaid-work/measuring-unpaid-domestic-and-care-work/>. Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN Women. Women in Politics: 2023. New York: United Nations, 2023. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4006055?e=pdf>.
3 Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN Women. Women in Politics: 2023. New York: United Nations, 2023. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4006055?e=pdf>.
4 United Nations Development Programme. Women's Participation in Local Governance and Peace Building: Lessons from West Gonja and Lambussie Districts. UNDP Ghana, 2025. https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2025-05/policy_brief_womens_participation_in_loc_gov-insights_lamb.pdf.