

# PrepAlpine

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# DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS DATED 07.03.2026

## GS Paper III: Economics

### 1. The Care Economy and the Invisible Labour of Women

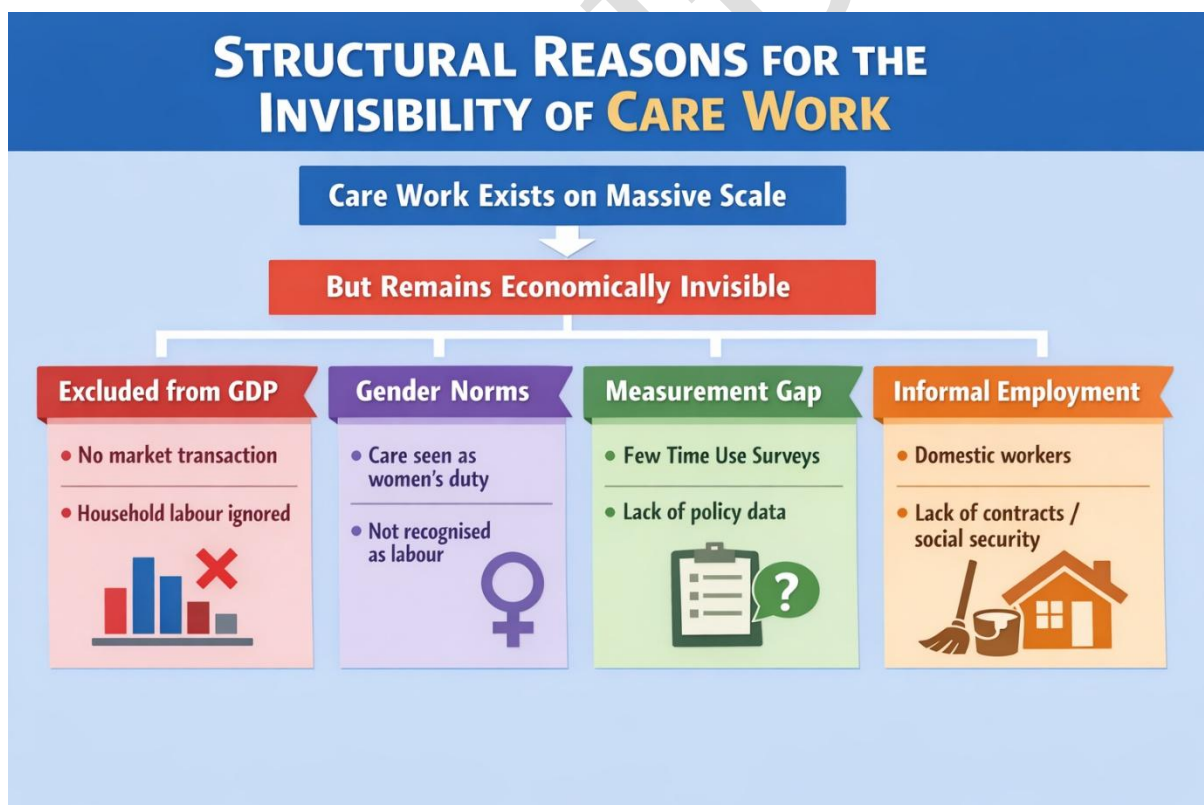
#### a. Introduction: Care Work as the Hidden Foundation of Society

A substantial share of the labour that sustains human life and social stability occurs within households and communities. Activities such as caring for children, supporting elderly family members, tending to the sick, preparing food, maintaining homes, and providing emotional support are indispensable for the functioning of families and societies. Yet this labour usually remains unpaid and largely unrecognised in economic discourse.

This set of activities is collectively referred to as the care economy. It represents the system of services and labour that maintain human wellbeing and reproduce the workforce across generations. Despite its foundational role, the care economy remains largely invisible within conventional economic accounting systems.

In most societies, including India, women perform the overwhelming share of this work. The unequal distribution of care responsibilities limits women's participation in education, employment, and public life. Consequently, recognising and strengthening the care economy has emerged as a critical concern for achieving gender equality, inclusive growth, and sustainable development.

To understand the significance of the care economy, it is necessary to examine its conceptual scope, the reasons behind its invisibility, and its broader implications for social and economic development.



#### b. Understanding the Care Economy

The care economy refers to all forms of labour involved in caring for people and maintaining households. It includes both paid services provided in the formal or informal labour market and unpaid activities performed within families and communities.

Care work operates through several interconnected dimensions.

### **i. Childcare**

Childcare involves a wide range of activities necessary for the physical, emotional, and intellectual development of children.

- Feeding and supervising children
- Supporting education and early learning
- Ensuring emotional security and social development

These activities contribute directly to human capital formation, shaping the capabilities of future generations.

### **ii. Elderly Care**

Elderly care refers to assistance provided to ageing individuals who require support in their daily lives.

- Helping with mobility and household tasks
- Managing healthcare needs and medical appointments
- Providing emotional companionship and psychological support

With rising life expectancy and demographic ageing, the demand for elderly care services is steadily increasing.

### **iii. Household Healthcare Support**

Families often provide significant healthcare support within households.

- Caring for sick family members
- Administering medicines and monitoring health conditions
- Coordinating medical consultations and treatment

Such care reduces the burden on formal healthcare systems.

### **iv. Domestic Work**

Domestic work consists of routine tasks required to maintain households.

- Cooking and preparing meals
- Cleaning living spaces
- Washing clothes and managing household resources

Although these activities form the backbone of everyday life, they are rarely recognised as economic output.

### **v. Emotional and Social Care**

Beyond physical tasks, caregiving also involves sustaining relationships and emotional wellbeing.

- Providing psychological support
- Maintaining family relationships
- Strengthening social cohesion within communities

These forms of care contribute to social stability and community resilience.

Despite their central importance, most of these activities remain outside formal economic accounting because they are performed without direct monetary compensation.

## **c. Why Care Work Remains Invisible**

Despite its fundamental role in sustaining societies, care work has historically remained under-recognised in economic and policy frameworks. Several structural factors explain this invisibility.

### **i. Exclusion from National Income Accounting**

The unpaid nature of most care work places it outside conventional economic accounting systems.

- National income statistics measure goods and services exchanged in markets.
- Household caregiving usually does not involve monetary transactions.
- Consequently, it is excluded from calculations of Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

#### **ii. Gendered Social Norms**

Deeply embedded gender norms have historically associated caregiving with women's socially prescribed roles.

- Care work is often treated as a natural duty rather than labour.
- This perception discourages recognition and policy support.
- Women's contributions therefore remain undervalued within economic systems.

#### **iii. Limited Measurement Mechanisms**

The lack of systematic measurement tools has also contributed to invisibility.

- Only recently have governments begun conducting time use surveys.
- These surveys document how individuals allocate time between paid work, domestic labour, and leisure.
- Such data helps reveal the scale of unpaid caregiving work.

#### **iv. Informal Nature of Paid Care Work**

Even paid care work frequently occurs in informal settings.

- Domestic workers and caregivers often operate in unregulated environments.
- Employment contracts and documentation are limited.
- Workers frequently lack legal protections and social security benefits.

These structural factors together explain why care work remains largely invisible despite its critical economic and social contributions.

### **d. Importance of Recognising the Care Economy**

Recognising the care economy is essential not only from the perspective of gender justice but also for broader economic and developmental objectives.

#### **i. Promoting Gender Equality**

The unequal distribution of care responsibilities restricts women's access to opportunities.

- Limits participation in education and employment
- Reduces access to leadership roles
- Reinforces structural gender inequality

Redistributing care responsibilities is therefore essential for achieving substantive gender equality.

#### **ii. Increasing Female Labour Force Participation**

Heavy domestic responsibilities often prevent women from entering or remaining in the labour force.

- Availability of childcare services enables women to work.
- Flexible caregiving arrangements increase economic participation.
- Greater participation contributes to economic growth.

India's female labour force participation has historically remained lower than global averages, partly due to the burden of unpaid domestic work.

#### **iii. Supporting Child Development**

Quality childcare has long-term developmental benefits.

- Improves nutrition and health outcomes
- Enhances early childhood education
- Strengthens cognitive and emotional development

Investment in early childhood care therefore generates long-term economic returns.

#### **iv. Ensuring Wellbeing of the Elderly**

With increasing life expectancy, societies must address the needs of ageing populations.

- Structured elderly care systems maintain dignity and independence.
- Healthcare support improves quality of life.
- Social support reduces isolation among elderly citizens.

#### **v. Generating Employment Opportunities**

The care sector also represents a major employment opportunity.

- Childcare centres and early education services
- Community health and nursing services
- Elder care and home-based caregiving

Expansion of care services can create millions of jobs while improving social welfare.

#### **e. Emerging Need for Care Infrastructure**

Several social and demographic transformations are increasing the demand for organised care systems.

##### **i. Urbanisation**

Urbanisation has encouraged large-scale migration to cities.

- Migrant families often lack extended family support.
- Traditional caregiving networks weaken.
- Institutional childcare becomes necessary.

##### **ii. Rise of Nuclear Families**

The decline of joint family systems affects caregiving patterns.

- Fewer family members share responsibilities.
- Care tasks fall on a smaller number of individuals.
- External support services become more important.

##### **iii. Population Ageing**

India's demographic structure is gradually shifting.

- Increasing life expectancy expands the elderly population.
- Long-term care services become necessary.
- Healthcare support systems must expand.

##### **iv. Rising Female Workforce Participation**

As more women enter paid employment:

- Household caregiving arrangements change.
- Demand for reliable childcare facilities increases.
- Work-family balance becomes a major policy issue.

These structural transformations indicate that caregiving can no longer remain confined to private households. Instead, it increasingly requires organised infrastructure supported by public policy.

## **f. Government Initiatives Supporting the Care Economy in India**

India has introduced several policies and programmes that indirectly strengthen the care economy.

### **i. Gender Budgeting**

Gender budgeting integrates gender perspectives into fiscal policy.

- Allocates public expenditure toward women-oriented programmes.
- Promotes gender-sensitive policy planning.
- Supports initiatives addressing women's welfare and empowerment.

### **ii. Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)**

The Anganwadi network forms the backbone of India's childcare support system.

- Provides nutrition services for children and mothers.
- Offers early childhood education.
- Supports community-level health monitoring.

### **iii. Training Programmes for Caregivers**

Training initiatives are emerging in sectors such as healthcare and elderly support.

- Development of skilled caregiving professionals
- Improved quality of care services
- Creation of employment opportunities

### **iv. Working Women's Hostels**

These hostels support women's labour mobility.

- Provide safe accommodation for working women
- Enable migration for employment opportunities
- Facilitate women's participation in urban labour markets

### **v. Labour Welfare Measures**

Labour regulations increasingly include provisions supporting working parents.

- Crèche facilities in workplaces
- Maternity benefits and parental leave provisions
- Worker welfare initiatives

While these initiatives address different dimensions of care, a more integrated policy framework is required to develop a comprehensive care ecosystem.

## **g. Challenges in Developing the Care Economy**

Despite its importance, the expansion of the care economy faces several structural challenges.

### **i. Under-recognition of Unpaid Care Work**

Caregiving remains largely invisible in economic policy discussions.

- Lack of valuation in national accounts
- Limited policy prioritisation
- Perception of care as a private responsibility

## **ii. Persistent Gender Inequality**

Women continue to bear a disproportionate share of caregiving responsibilities.

- Limits women's economic independence
- Reinforces traditional gender roles
- Reduces participation in formal employment

## **iii. Limited Access to Affordable Care Services**

Many households lack access to organised caregiving infrastructure.

- Shortage of childcare facilities
- Limited elderly care services
- High cost of private caregiving support

## **iv. Informal Employment Conditions for Care Workers**

Many care workers operate in precarious labour conditions.

- Absence of social security coverage
- Low wages and job insecurity
- Lack of legal protection

## **v. Cultural Attitudes Toward Care Work**

Social norms continue to define caregiving as a woman's responsibility.

- Limited male participation in household tasks
- Resistance to redistribution of care roles
- Social undervaluation of caregiving labour

## **h. Way Forward: Strengthening the Care Economy**

Developing a robust care economy requires coordinated policy interventions.

### **i. Recognising Unpaid Care Work**

Governments must incorporate unpaid care work into economic planning.

- Use time-use survey data for policymaking
- Improve visibility of household labour
- Integrate caregiving into development strategies

### **ii. Expanding Care Infrastructure**

Public investment in care services is essential.

- Childcare centres and early learning facilities
- Community healthcare systems
- Elder care services and support networks

### **iii. Encouraging Shared Care Responsibilities**

Societies must promote greater male participation in caregiving.

- Public awareness campaigns
- Workplace policies such as parental leave
- Educational initiatives promoting gender equality

### **iv. Professionalising Care Services**

Improving the status of care work requires professionalisation.

- Training and certification programmes
- Regulatory standards for care institutions
- Better wages and working conditions

#### **v. Expanding Social Security for Care Workers**

Care workers require protection and economic security.

- Inclusion in social protection schemes
- Minimum wage enforcement
- Access to healthcare and pension benefits

#### **Conclusion**

The care economy forms the hidden foundation upon which societies and economies operate. Without the continuous labour invested in nurturing children, supporting families, and maintaining households, the productive economy itself could not function.

Yet much of this labour remains invisible because it occurs outside market transactions and is predominantly performed by women. Recognising, redistributing, and supporting care work is therefore essential for achieving gender equality, expanding employment opportunities, and ensuring inclusive development.

By investing in care infrastructure and acknowledging the economic value of caregiving, societies can transform invisible labour into a recognised pillar of sustainable growth and human wellbeing.

## Reader's Note — About This Current Affairs Compilation

Dear Aspirant,

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While every effort has been made to balance depth with brevity, please keep the following in mind:

### 1. Orientation & Purpose

This compilation is curated primarily from the UPSC Mains perspective — with emphasis on conceptual clarity, analytical depth, and interlinkages across GS papers.

However, the PrepAlpine team is simultaneously developing a dedicated Prelims-focused Current Affairs Series, designed for:

- factual coverage
- data recall
- Prelims-style MCQs
- objective pattern analysis

This Prelims Edition will be released separately as a standalone publication.

### 2. Content Length

Some sections may feel shorter or longer depending on topic relevance and news density. To fit your personal preference, you may freely resize or summarize sections using any LLM tool (ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, etc.) at your convenience.

### 3. Format Flexibility

The formatting combines:

- paragraphs
- lists
- tables
- visual cues

—all optimised for retention.

If you prefer a specific style (lists → paras, paras → tables, etc.), feel free to convert using any free LLM.

### 4. Monthly Current Affairs Release

The complete Monthly Current Affairs Module will be released soon, optimized to a compact 100–150 pages — comprehensive yet concise, exam-ready, and revision-efficient.

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