

Towards caring societies

A call to action

The world is not on course to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. Of 36 targets reviewed in the 2023 UN Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR), “only 2 are on track to be achieved, while progress on eight is deteriorating”. Since the setting of the goals in 2015 by the international community, “implementation was too slow, and even regressing in some areas like climate action, biodiversity loss and inequality before the pandemic and has now suffered significant setbacks including in poverty eradication, gender equality, education and eliminating hunger”.¹

Humanity is also failing to achieve its environmental goals. Currently, the degradation of the Earth’s land surface through human activities is negatively impacting the well-being of at least 3.2 billion people, pushing the planet towards a sixth mass species extinction, and costing more than 10 per cent of the annual global gross product in loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services according to the 2019 IPBES report.² According to 2023 IPCC report, GHG emissions to date have already caused a warming of 1.1 degree above preindustrial levels and the world is on course for an average 3.2 degree of warming by 2100. At about 1.9°C warming, *half of the human population* could be exposed to periods of life-threatening climatic conditions arising from the coupled impacts of extreme heat and humidity.³

A world in a crisis of care

At the heart of the multiple failures of humanity to achieve its goals lies a *systemic crisis of care*. This crisis is due to chronic underinvestment into care systems which provide for the paid and unpaid activities that contribute to human well-being (including childcare, education, health care, care for the disabled and for older people) as well as for the rest of the living world and for the built environment.

The situation is more dire and urgent in the global south due to a lack of social protection, inadequate infrastructures, limited fiscal space, which are made worse by extreme multidimensional inequality and unequal power relations between the global north and the south, well-illustrated by the “care drain”. Migrant women are disproportionately represented amongst formal and informal care workers in the global North.

Notwithstanding, there are many examples of social innovation and good practices in the global south in terms of care models that deliver for people while staying within planetary boundaries> there is much to be learned from these practices which could become sources of inspiration for the rest of the world.

- **Human care systems under pressure**

Instead of recognizing that caring for self and others is a public good that is essential to societal well-being, care is conceived as a burden whose costs need to be reduced in the name of productivity and

¹ <https://sdgs.un.org/gsdrr>

² <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/warning-sixth-mass-species-extinction-cards>

³ <https://ec.europa.eu/research-and-innovation/en/horizon-magazine/tipping-points-lead-irreversible-shifts-climate-experts>

prosperity. As a result, paid and formal care work remains severely undervalued while informal and unpaid care work is not rewarded at all. Care work is also highly gendered: Formal and informal care works is mainly provided by women, girls, migrant works and low income people. Care structures, which are increasingly controlled by for-profit entities, are coming under increasing pressure to become more efficient. Hence they are understaffed and under resourced.

- **A careless destruction of the living world**

The overconsumption of natural resources is leading to a destabilization of the climate, a mass extinction of species and widespread pollution of the air, water and soils, with disastrous consequences for both humans and non-humans. Caring for the living world is an essential and cost effective investment into long-term societal well-being, peace and prosperity. Yet, it is still largely seen by many governments and citizens as a distraction or a luxury, which individuals, companies and countries can ill-afford.

Others also see a trade-off between caring for humans and non-humans. While there can be difficult choices, for instance in terms of public spending priorities, it is also increasingly clear that the health of people, animals, plants and ecosystems is interdependent and indivisible. Food systems provide a stark illustration of this indivisibility: they are both failing to put an end to malnutrition, obesity and hunger, endangering human and non-human health through zoonoses and widespread air, water and soil pollution and generating immense suffering for animals because of intensive farming techniques.

Our vision

Solving the current polycrisis requires building a more caring society in which care for human and non-human life is celebrated as the basis of well-being, care shared fairly, valued, and given status and care activities are supported with time and resources.

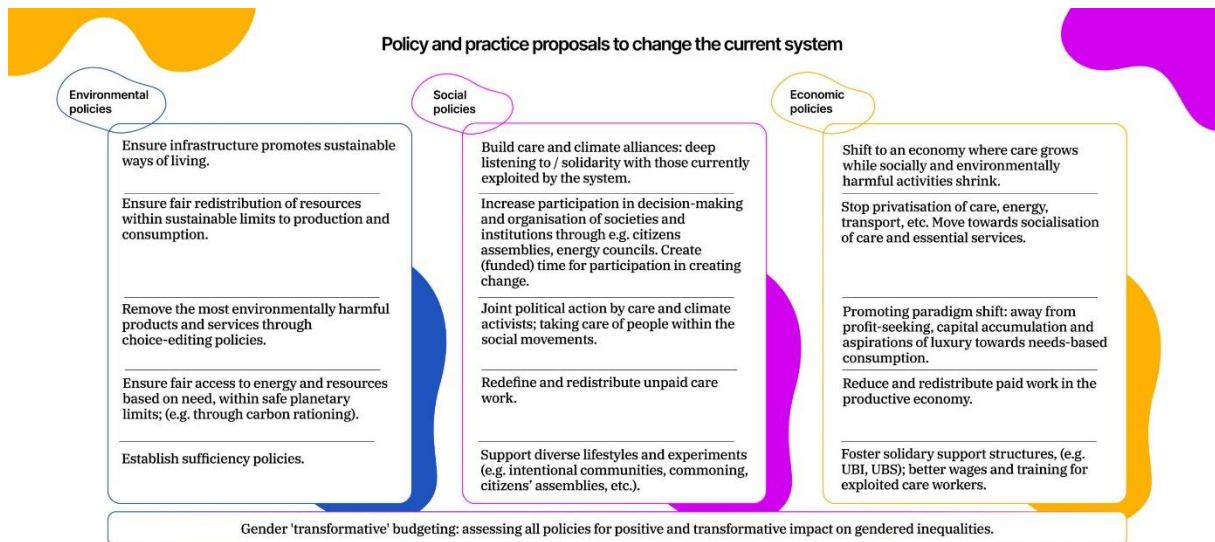
Moving to such a society requires a paradigm shift away from economic growth, profit seeking and capital accumulation as well as purposed-led innovation towards material sufficiency, repairability and share-ability.

A caring society, based on an economy which provides for human basic needs and promotes well-being for all, also means ensuring fair access to natural resources regardless of gender, race, class or wealth, while respecting planetary boundaries and allowing nature to regenerate and thrive.

Moving to caring societies does not require ascetism: it is about building a more fulfilling society which can sustainably satisfy essential needs for all, such as nutrition, housing, mobility and leisure, as well as cater for more immaterial, but equally vital, needs such as social relations, for family time or access to nature.

A call to action

We are calling for decision-makers and other duty-bearers (such as companies or employers) to change the following policy and practice frameworks at the local, national and global level:



From 'Economies that Dare to Care — Achieving social justice and preventing ecological breakdown by putting care at the heart of our societies'. © Hot or Cool Institute 2023. <https://hotorcool.org>



We are also urging for a shift in the societal norms and in power relations which are underpinning the current crisis of care including gender stereotypes, racism, colonialism, consumerism and individualism.

To move towards more caring societies, we can build on a myriad of good practices from around the world, ranging from companies adopting caring practices for employees to grassroot co-housing or community kitchen projects (see examples in the Dare to Care report).

We are warning against a one size fits all. Instead, a diversity of approaches, which recognize the specificity of ecological, demographic, health and socio-economic needs, will be needed. We also call for a democratic renewal, with new mechanisms and processes, so citizens can better participate in societal decisions.

As the window of opportunity to prevent further irreparable damage to the environment is closing, action is urgently needed, and the time is now to build more caring societies to protect and nurture human and non-human life on earth.

What is the Forum for caring societies?

What is the Forum for caring societies? The Forum for Caring Societies is a collaborative community of practice which promotes fair, sustainable, care-centered societies. By bringing together researchers, activists, practitioners, funders, and policymakers, which share a common vision for care-centered societies, it aims at creating a multidisciplinary, evidence-based movement for change. It is currently hosted by the Hot or Cool Institute. To connect, find out more or join the Forum for Caring Societies, please contact us: care@hotorcool.org