

Chapter 15
Widening women's choices:
The case for childcare in the era of globalisation*

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Summary: Changing labour markets and production patterns over the past 20 years have greatly bolstered the case for strong public policies and programmes on childcare. Women have entered the labour force in unprecedented numbers under globalisation. Liberalisation and economic restructuring processes that increase demands on household income have heightened women's obligation to take up paid work, in "flexible" forms of employment and without significant reallocation of their household and caregiving duties. The forces of globalisation have changed the relative price of paid and unpaid work and in effect raised the opportunity cost of women's unpaid household labour. If globalisation has increased the demands on women to enter the labour force, and if children are seen as a public good, as a social investment, it follows that childcare support must form an integral part of public policies on basic social services: there is far too little recognition of this crucial need in most countries. In a large part of the industrialised west, childcare is in crisis. Overall in developing countries, the retreat of the state from the provision of public services –compounded by demographic and family structures changes– has complicated the task of caring for children. This chapter argues that access to reliable and affordable childcare, a mix of public, private and voluntary sector initiatives, the involvement of men are essential to the realisation of women's rights to freely choose employment and children's rights to enjoy health and happiness.

JEL: D13, H53, I38, J13, J16

*** This study presents the views of its author and not the official UNICEF position in this field.**

This is chapter 15 of the overall study "Harnessing Globalisation for Children" edited by Giovanni Andrea Cornia

** The author gratefully acknowledges the guidance of Eva Jespersen. This chapter draws on some of the information in *They Can't Do It All: A Call for Expanded Investments in Childcare*, a paper written for UNICEF by Charlotte Johnson-Welch, Patricia Bonnard, Amanda Spring Ritchie, Richard Strickland and Marjorie Sims of the International Council for Research on Women (ICRW), September 2000

1. Introduction

Women, more than men, find that their career prospects hinge on their ability to balance work and family responsibilities. Given that women continue to be principally responsible for the care and wellbeing of their children, access to reliable and affordable childcare is imperative to the realisation of women's rights to freely choose employment and children's rights to enjoy health and happiness.

Changing labour markets and production patterns over the past 20 years (see chapter 4 of this compilation) have only accentuated longstanding anxieties and dilemmas over childcare. While women have entered the labour force in unprecedented numbers, the nature of their employment in low-skill and precarious jobs exposes them to market volatility and denies them basic social and legal protection. Economic restructuring in various forms resulting in the removal of subsidies for health and food has at the same time increased demands on household income. Millions of women are in low-paid, part-time and insecure work in both the formal and informal sector. Women with higher skills are embracing the possibilities of a more flexible organisation of working time held out by the changing dynamics of the workplace. Women are a growing proportion of the migrant labour force within and across countries, many of them care-providers who leave their own children behind. In every situation, the absence of affordable and quality childcare means that women to a greater or lesser degree forfeit economic opportunities for better pay and professional advancement. They are also forced to rely on unpaid family care-givers or spend a substantial portion of their income on private care – all at immense cost to their wellbeing and that of their families.

Government support for childcare services, as well as public policies that are most mindful of the need to reconcile work and family, are strongest in the Nordic countries and parts of western Europe. In much of the rest of the industrialised west, childcare is in crisis. Here, as overall in developing countries, the retreat of the state from public services, demographic changes and the transformation of family structures have greatly complicated the task of caring for children.

This chapter argues that publicly supported childcare is a critical factor in enabling women to fully realise the employment opportunities afforded by market liberalisation and technological advances.

The changes in the global economy that have dramatically altered the landscape of women's employment underscore the need for greater, not less stewardship by States. It is the State that has the primary obligation to ensure that globalisation works for women and children by providing childcare supports as part of a wider social safety net. This is especially because market expansion tends to penalise altruism and care. Institutions and economies have been free-riding on the caring labour that women mostly provide. Under

globalization, women in most countries continue to carry the double burden of wage employment and care services.

Systematic and dependable childcare provided by the State, is therefore a ‘public good,’ an essential prerequisite for women’s successful integration in the global economy – as productive workers with equal opportunity for economic advancement – as well as for the healthy development and socialisation of the next generation. Further, the fact that women’s entry to the labour force is primarily through the informal sector, beyond the reach of labour union and private sector arrangements, strengthens the need for state-supported interventions in childcare.

The public policy imperative assumes importance given that childcare provision in countries worldwide is increasingly a mix of services by the state and public sector at different levels, the voluntary and private sectors and community arrangements. On the positive side, the varying nature of provision reflects evolving approaches to reconciling work and family duties. But potential benefits to working mothers can be offset by shifting perceptions of responsibilities by various actors in the absence of a strong State role.

This chapter uses the term childcare to include formal adult supervision of children aged 0-5 years, maternity benefits that protect women’s re-entry into the workforce, and family-enabling policies, such as paternity leave, that make care-giving a shared responsibility. It takes as given the multiple benefits in health and social development that accrue to children from quality childcare, on which there exists a substantial literature. The focus here is on examining the extent to which publicly supported childcare, or lack thereof, affects the expansion of women’s employment choices. The processes of globalisation – whether in the form of privatisation trends, international labour and production patterns and the retreat of the state from basic social services – form the broad context for this chapter. The experience of women in transition countries, where they have simultaneously lost employment opportunities and state-provided childcare services in the shift to a market economy, is a case in point.

The following sections examine the role of the State in providing childcare services, especially those geared to working mothers, overall in industrialised and in developing countries. Straightforward comparisons are difficult given the lack of extensive documentation of childcare provision in developing countries, due in large part to the predominantly non-formal nature of coverage. Where documented, much of formal childcare arrangements are aimed at improving child development through better socialisation and nutrition rather than accommodating women’s changing employment patterns. The role of labour movements in securing childcare is also examined in the context of the expanding global economy with its massive induction of female workers. Childcare workers, overwhelming female, are a growth sector, with important implications for women’s and children’s rights.

2. Context

It is by now well established that economic and social changes brought about by the integration of capital and labour markets over the past two decades have had a striking impact on women's employment. Women's share of the labour force has risen worldwide between 1985 and 1998. In Asia, Africa and Latin America, the number of economically active women today is more than 600 million, and rising. Processes of economic integration have demonstrated their potential to greatly expand opportunities for women's participation in the economy and independence in society. The shifts in production and output patterns from agriculture to manufacturing and services in developing countries have in particular drawn women from subsistence and unpaid work into the paid economy.

These changes have occurred, not coincidentally, in a context of generally rising levels of female education and falling fertility. More women are entering and staying in the labour market through their adult lives than ever before. In a marked shift from traditional working patterns – when they worked before having children and after they were grown – women are staying in the labour market throughout their reproductive years. In European and other modernised societies, women's increased labour force participation reflects their changing social position and status, especially improved education, as well as shifts in the occupational and industrial structure of the labour force and in the demand for labour. The last includes a move away from standard, full-time formal employment, associated mostly with a male industrial workforce, to a more diverse labour force, with a range of part-time and otherwise 'flexible' employment, in which the boundaries between formal and informal employment are increasingly blurred (Yeandle, Gore and Herrington 1999).

At least three macro-economic forces have created the impetus behind women's entry into the labour force under globalisation. Trade liberalisation, export-oriented production and growing international mobility of capital that have resulted in a regional division of labour have also called for a greater flexibility in terms of employment to enable business to quickly respond to changing and uncertain market conditions. Technological changes have allowed a stratification of the workforce and the creation of a large pool of low to medium-skilled workers with limited possibilities for upward mobility and on-the-job training. Related to these two factors are organisational changes in production that have led to a proliferation of "atypical" or contingent jobs through outsourcing, sub-contracting, part-time and home-based work (United Nations 1999). Taken together, these forces have made women the labour supply of choice.

Women's employment has soared with the expansion of production for export and the shift of labour-intensive manufacturing in textiles, garments, footwear, toys and electronics assembly to low-wage developing countries. In East and Southeast Asia, for example, up to 80 percent of the workforce in export-processing zones is female, with particularly high rates of women's employment in the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Thailand, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore and Sri Lanka (UNIFEM 1995). Bangladesh's female labour force grew from 10 percent in 1985 to 63 percent in 1989 as

a result of economic liberalization; much of this growth occurred in textiles, pharmaceuticals and fish processing (Fontana, Joekes and Masika 1998). The number of garment factories in the country shot up from four in 1978 to 2,400 in 1995, employing 1.2 million workers, 90 per cent of them women aged below 25. Seventy per cent of all women in wage employment in Bangladesh are in the garment sector. Women's share of export-manufacturing jobs has increased sharply in the Dominican Republic, Indonesia, Mauritius, Taiwan Province of China and Tunisia (United Nations 1999a). In Central America, the *maquiladoras* – assembly plants that benefit from investment incentives – employ some 250,000 people, 90 per cent of them women (ICFTU 1999).

The massive induction of women into the multinational labour force has however occurred in conditions of low unionisation, increasing their vulnerability to multiple forms of discrimination and subordination. The EPZs in particular typically employ women under harsh conditions of long working days, no social security, limited rest breaks and even summary dismissal upon pregnancy. The repetitive, low-skill nature of work locks women into dead-end jobs; when production calls for higher skills or technological sophistication, women are replaced with men. Employment in the electronics industry in the Republic of Korea and in the *maquiladoras* of Mexico, for example, has shifted in favour of men (United Nations 1999a).

Further, the very features that make women the preferred labour – flexible terms of employment, casual nature of contracts, and lack of organising – are precisely those that make them the shock absorbers for market volatility and economic crisis or recession (United Nations 1999).

In countries undergoing economic transition, women who have long been engaged in formal employment are often among the first to be laid off, and forced into unregulated jobs that are not permanent or secure, including seasonal or part-time activities (Fontana and Wood 2000). Female unemployment has risen sharply in countries in eastern and Central Europe: since 1989, women lost an estimated 24 million jobs. In Hungary (population 10 million), women lost 900,000 jobs since 1989, which translates to the loss of every third job for women. The presence of children strikingly reduces women's prospects for employment – just over ten per cent of young women and 40 per cent of middle-aged women with three or more children are employed (UNICEF 1999). In 1997, women were 70 per cent of the total unemployed in the Russian Federation – a figure that does not take into account various forms of hidden unemployment, whether part-time work, a shorter working day or week, or unpaid leave following company closures (ICFTU 1999).

As in manufacturing output, the expansion of the digital economy in the 1990s has led to a relocation of labour-intensive data entry and encoding jobs to developing countries, employing growing numbers of women. For example, almost 5,000 women in the Caribbean countries were employed in data processing in the late 1990s. Tele-centres have generated jobs for thousands of women and men in countries such as Bangladesh, Nepal and India – as many as an estimated 250,000 jobs for women in mobile telephony centres in India. These predominantly female occupations often lack career upgrading

and satisfactory wages and conditions of work, and are already in the worst cases emerging as the “sweatshops of the digital era” (ILO 2001).

Low-skill data entry applications are just one facet of a rapidly expanding services sector that employs a high proportion of women. Computer programming and software, financial services (banking and finance), trade-related services such as tourism and entertainment and household services such as childcare and domestic work have overwhelming numbers of women workers. In the European Union, employment in all Member States is strongly biased towards the services sector – ranging from more than 70 per cent in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Sweden to about 55 per cent in Greece and Portugal. This sector also provides the most part-time employment for both women and men (Yeandle, Gore and Herrington 1999). Of more than 30 million jobs created in EU Member States since 1961, 25 million have been taken by women, mainly in the service sector (Cancedda 2000). Brazil presents a fairly typical picture of the services sector in middle-income countries: nearly 80 per cent of all women workers are employed in the textile, garment or electronics sectors, as farm workers, vendors, domestic servants, nurses and other care-givers (ICFTU 1999). The increased trade in services, particularly in areas such as domestic work, care-giving and the entertainment sector (large sections of which include tourism and the sex industry), has resulted in a surge in female migrant labour from countries with high unemployment and/or economies in transition. Migrant women in many countries often work under grossly exploitative conditions and social isolation (United Nations 2000).

Whether in manufacturing or services, non-standard employment, characterised by the absence of an indefinite work contract, full-time work and legal and social protection, is on the rise in all countries (ILO 1999). Informal sector establishments operate with little capital, technology or skills, lack access to organised market, credit, formal education or training institutions, public services and amenities and provide no more than a subsistence livelihood. Women from poor households and/or with low skills predominate in the informal sector (United Nations 1999a). Up to 75 percent of women who work, particularly new entrants to the workforce, may be employed in the informal and semi-formal sectors (ICRW 2000). In most countries, more women than men are found in the informal sector or non-wage employment (United Nations 2000a). Although official figures do not provide a full picture, women are an estimated 65 percent of the informal labour force in Indonesia; 41 percent in the Republic of Korea; 62 percent in the Philippines; 78 percent in Thailand; and 80 percent in Turkey (ICRW 2000). They are also 34 percent of the self-employed in Thailand and 27 percent in Indonesia.

When informal sector activities are linked to the formal sector, especially in manufacturing, they generate a range of home-based, piece-rate and sub-contracting jobs for women. In South Asia, apparently self-employed women in manufacturing activities undertake piece-rate work at home in contractor-mediated arrangements as, for example, in garments and leather goods finishing industries. Home-based production is thought to account for half of all employment in Sri Lanka and as much as 33 per cent in the Republic of Korea (United Nations 1999).

Home-based women's work related to industrial activities and products predominates in industrialised and developing countries alike. The clothing, textiles, carpets and leather sectors, which require minimal equipment but long labour, have traditionally contracted out work on a piece-rate basis. To these have recently been added high-technology manufacturing and electrical, plastic and light metal goods, which have many labour-intensive components. Technological changes, with their possibilities for "telework," can be expected to further expand and diversify the range of home-based and informal activities in the future. In Europe, homework in the service sector, especially that of a clerical nature, like typing, invoicing, data entry, word-processing, editing and translating, already exceeds that in the manual homework sector (United Nations 1999a).

Women workers may prefer informal employment including home-based work for a variety of reasons – flexibility of hours that allows simultaneous performance of other family tasks, including taking care of children and the elderly, and avoidance of a daily commute and interactions with men outside the family. But the advantages to employers far outweigh these supposed gains. Labour flexibility allows employers to drastically reduce labour and overhead costs, eliminate benefits and vary the nature and volume of work in response to market fluctuations.

Women's induction into the irregular and/or low-paid workforce has occurred at a time when structural adjustment and other fiscal austerity policies have led to massive male unemployment and underemployment in many countries. In many instances, women's informal employment contributes more to household income than men's full-time employment at low, stagnant salaries, rendering families reliant on women's economic activities. The rise in the numbers of women in paid work in such circumstances has been interpreted as distress signals from the economy, occurring as it does at a time when governments cut back on investments in social services, including health, education and financial support (subsidies, income transfers among others) to the poor. Women and girls disproportionately bear the economic and human cost of the ensuing demands on household income, filling the gap in public services and often foregoing their use of any services themselves because of the imposition of fees.

3. Rationale for Childcare

The prevailing trends of women's increased participation in paid employment therefore show that their entry in the labour force remains contingent on their personal and family status as much as on the demands of the market. Women's primary responsibility for the home and care of children means that they enter the labour force at a disadvantage. Female labour mobility more than that of men is hampered by gender inequality. The proliferation of non-standard and part-time forms of employment may offer women greater flexibility in balancing work and family responsibilities, but they can be restrictive for women who do not choose such types of work. At least 41 per cent of women in one European survey cited "housework" as a factor that prevented them from

taking up full-time employment (Cancedda 2000).¹ Enabling women to rise from the lower rungs of employment and achieve greater economic advancement must form a primary impetus for childcare provision.

The changing structure of the family provides another powerful argument. The entry of more and more women into the labour force, higher divorce and lower fertility rates have all shaken the edifice of the “traditional” couple-headed family in which mothers are caregivers and fathers income-earners. While women have increasingly taken on the latter role, men have not to same extent become caregivers, given the profoundly unequal gender division of work in the household (Cancedda 2000).² Further, female-headed and female-maintained households are on the rise worldwide. Women head 9-42 per cent of all households in developing countries. In EU States, single-parent households rose to ten per cent of the total in 1993 (Cancedda 2000). Male migration in developing countries has left many households *de facto* headed by women who have to provide for children often without remittances from men. Childcare support services are especially critical to ensuring the economic and physical wellbeing of the growing numbers of “atypical” families.

There are other compelling arguments for all stakeholders in women's paid labour to ensure the availability of quality and affordable childcare. It makes sound economic sense – low turnover and greater productivity among women workers are proven outcomes when childcare is assured. It can also help reverse the declines in fertility levels, with their worrying implications for the labour pool, evident in some industrialised countries as well as those with economies in transition, where women lack essential family and child supports.

Further, importantly for family wellbeing, working women, more than men, can be counted upon to use their income for the benefit of their children. Several studies have shown that children's overall health and intellectual growth improve when their mothers work. Children taken care of by a competent adult when their mothers work are also more likely to have better nutritional status than those looked after by another child. A hot cooked meal provided at public daycare centres is critical to food security in countries with severe child malnutrition. Childcare support also frees other children in the family, typically girls, from responsibilities of caring for younger siblings. This simultaneously enables girls to continue education and job training and improves a child's intake of nutrients. By freeing women to take up paid work and enabling older siblings to return to school, early childhood development programmes have been found to especially benefit poorest households in low-income countries in Africa (UNICEF 2000a).

¹ The study cites a 1995 European Community Household Panel Survey that categorised by reason persons working less than 30 hours a week in their main job.

² One analysis of time budget surveys in Denmark, Italy, France and Sweden showed that non-working women spent on average 5 hours and 15 minutes a day on housework, while women working full time spent 2 hours and 55 minutes. The time spent by men on housework, by contrast, varied little, whether they lived with working or non-working women: 58 minutes in the first and 47 minutes in the latter instance. *The Welfare State and Time Allocation: Denmark, Italy, France & Sweden* (1999 unpublished report), by J. Bonke and E. Koch Weser.

The economic, social and psychosocial rationale for the provision of childcare is no longer in question. The challenge lies in formulating appropriate workplace and public policy measures that can deliver and sustain affordable and quality services. The following sections examine some programmes and approaches in developing and industrialised countries in terms of their impact on women's employment.

4. Developing Countries: The Absentee State

For most developing countries, quality and sustainable state-provided childcare services are an utopian ideal. Reliable data on the types and extent of coverage are scant, but it is reasonable to conclude that publicly supported and supervised programmes for childcare are limited. Barely one per cent of Peru's preschoolers is formally enrolled in daycare (UNICEF 1992). In India, about a fourth of children aged 3-6 years are reached by some kind of services, including programmes at various levels in the Integrated Child Development Services. The poor attention to childcare services is due in large part to the invisibility of women's work under current definitions. The census overlooks women's contribution to the economy as self-employed or workers in the informal sector, as home-based, piece-rate contractual workers, unpaid family labour in artisan households and so on. An estimated 90 per cent of all women in the work force in India are in the unorganised sector. (Swaminathan 1997).

In expanding childcare facilities to meet the demands of both working parents and children, many countries have relied on "mixed" initiatives, involving wide-ranging partnerships between governments, donor and/or UN specialised agencies, local organisations and religious institutions. The growing involvement of community, other non-government and private entities in the provision of childcare has in many instances improved quality and coverage of services. But it also points to the diminishing role that the state in many developing countries sees for itself in this area.

Developing countries increasingly target childcare services at populations perceived to be most in need. A national early childhood development project in South Africa, for example, which targets extremely poor families in inner cities, uses existing community-based preschool projects and non-governmental organisations to train teachers. The government also provides a child support benefit grant for children below seven years who qualify in a means test weighted to rural areas and informal settlements (UNICEF 2000b). Turkey has a range of early childhood development and preschool programmes, mostly for children aged 5-7 years, with free services for children of poor families. One non-formal approach, directed at working mothers, allows the care of children in their own homes by caregivers who undergo a programme that has trained more than 6,400 women (UNICEF 2000c).

Public childcare programmes that incorporate mixed and alternative approaches are increasingly a feature of developing-country efforts to meet the needs of heterogeneous populations and the growing workforce in the informal sector. In Mexico, for example, the three general preschool categories in public education have variants involving the

community and extending the hours of operation to a full day, although the scope of coverage is still limited. The National Council for the Promotion of Education (CONAFE), which runs the main community preschool programme, also runs a small programme in which community mothers become teachers, with childcare linked to productive projects for women, an experimental preschool programme for migrant children and another for indigenous children. Not reported in preschool statistics is a small public childcare programme in daycare homes, which includes children aged 3-5 years, and is run by a national system of volunteers administered by the Family Institute. The combination of actors and approaches however does not always well serve parents employed in the informal sector (in 1995 estimated at 40 per cent of the labour force) or women in the paid workforce (estimated at more than 34 per cent) (Myers 1995).

In El Salvador, the Centres for Child Development (CDI) programme in San Salvador serves the children of women who work in and around municipal markets. Funded and administered by the San Salvador Mayor's office, CDI operates through a network of seven centres open on weekdays from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Community participation is encouraged, and a major goal for the future of the program is to develop community-based management of the centers. In 1997, CDI expanded its services from custodial care to physical and mental health, nutrition, education, and recreation services. Each centre serves 60 children and has a staff of administrative directors, psychologists, general coordinators and educators in addition to care-givers. The municipality pays staff salaries and daily operating costs are covered in part by fees paid by parents (ICRW 2000).

Community participation is central to Peru's Wawa Wasi national childcare programme, initiated in 1993 by the Ministry of Education and UNICEF with financial and technical support from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), European Union, and the World Food Programme. Wawa Wasi is a highly decentralised programme that reaches extremely poor families through a network of childcare centres. It covers approximately 35,000 children, with each home-based centre serving 6-8 children and each community-based centre serving about 24. Wawa Wasi centres enroll children under three years of age and cater to their basic nutrition, health, and education needs.

In 1996, when the programme came under the direction of Peru's Ministry for the Advancement of Women and Human Development (ProMuDeh), it began to actively invest in women with strategies to reduce poverty and improve health. It encouraged women's management of childcare centres and trained local women to work in childcare. A recent evaluation of the Wawa Wasi program found a high demand for services, but also identified a number of challenges. These include poor coverage in areas of extreme poverty; unrealistic expectations by parents regarding contributions; the insufficient training and rapid turnover of caregivers; and low utilization by eligible families. Accordingly, the Inter-American Development Bank approved a loan of \$103.6 million in 1999 to fund a five-year project to strengthen and expand Wawa Wasi throughout Peru (ICRW 2000).

Elsewhere in parts of South America, the Catholic Church has influenced the emergence of community action for the creation of preschools. Brazil's Struggle Movement for

Crèches in 1978 had its origins in child-caring initiatives supported by mothers, neighbours and parish priests. In Sao Paulo, the impetus for preschools came from mothers' groups who put pressure on public authorities and the private sector, backed by the Youth Pastoral linked to the Catholic Church, the Societies of Neighbourhood Friends and the crèche movement. Similarly, in the state of Rio de Janeiro, groups of women in poor urban districts who came together for parish activities took the lead in organising preschools. These community initiatives sprung from the belief that preschool was a right of both working mothers and of poor families (ILO 2000).

Childcare support provided by community service organisations is critical to filling the gaps that the public sector and other actors cannot. They are strategically placed to support childcare service delivery and to function as intermediaries between individuals and their communities, between communities and government, and between governments and international agencies. Closeness to the grassroots allows community organisations to identify local needs and resources, while their smaller and more flexible institutional structures make them more approachable than large bureaucracies. For example, community home-based care can be a happy option for working mothers on several counts: they work more hours and miss work less, increasing their take-home income; they have greater peace of mind because their children are safer and better cared for than if they had gone to work with their mothers or stayed at home with siblings; and school attendance by older siblings goes up because they are not burdened with childcare.

In some developing countries, home-based care, backed by the state and in cooperation with non-governmental organisations, has evolved in response to women's changing employment and the consequent need for childcare provisions that are more flexible than traditional preschools. For example, more than 70 per cent of families in the programme for home-based community day care established by the Colombian Family Welfare Institute (under the Ministry of Health) are employed in the informal sector. By offering childcare to poor and/or working-class families in cities, small towns and villages and remote areas, the programme has ensured a modicum of nutrition and health care for children and helped working parents become better integrated in the labour force. Much of women's earnings, in particular, can be linked to the programme. In 1992, one-fifth of participating families were headed by women. Fifty-two per cent of all mothers brought in more than half of household income, and 64 per cent assumed some financial responsibility for their families.

Each daycare home is run by a trained "community mother," with the help of an assistant, and provides care for 15 neighbourhood children during weekdays. Parent associations are actively involved in the functioning of the daycare homes. Participating parents pay a monthly cash fee and volunteer clerical services through the associations. Non-governmental organisations have been key to the programme's organisation and expansion by developing technical material, donating food and supplies and serving as the community's liaison with the Institute.

Above all, the programme's reliance on non-formal methods and its adaptability to local needs have proven critical to its reach and impact. In its first five years, the programme raised its coverage to nearly a million children, compared to just 120,000 reached by the Institute over 20 years, using formal methods. Similar strategies for comprehensive

childcare in a range of community settings have been used with success in Ecuador and Venezuela (UNICEF 1993).

Women involved in home-based care generally require an external source of start-up capital. Because of its decentralized nature, it can be costly to bring home-based care into compliance with business regulations. Even the nominal fee (either in-kind or in cash) can be prohibitive for some families. Care providers also need administrative and technical support, as well as training and supervision – often provided by non-governmental organisations. In Mexico, for example, NGOs helped community-based preschools that cater to low-income families get off the ground with teacher training, technical advice and even some financial support. Many of these private alternatives to public childcare provide flexibility and convenience, crucial childcare needs of women-headed families or those in which both parents work outside the home. But they may not be viable in the long term because teachers are paid less than a minimum wage and no benefits (Myers 1995).

Childcare centres run by community organisations are usually located near women's homes or workplaces and tend to serve a larger number of children than home-based care providers. A well-documented example of work site-based services is the Mobile Crèches programme in India. It uses a mobile centre to provide care for newborns and children up to six years of age whose mothers work in coal mines, factories, plantation farms, and construction sites (Mobile Crèches 1999; Shantha 1997; Evans 1995). Although well-funded by a range of donors, including building contractors and builders, this model has not been widely replicated elsewhere in the country. The complexity of the task, the lack of a trained cadre of workers, uncertainty of results due to heavy turnover of labour, lack of cooperation from the building industry are some constraints (Swaminathan 1997). They are illustrative of the difficulties the voluntary sector faces in providing care services in environments where demand outstrips capacity.

5. Industrialised Countries: The Retreating State

Child rights, gender equality and the reconciliation of family and work responsibilities have been prominent themes in European Union initiatives and directives since the 1970s. They feature strongly in recent individual national action plans and employment strategies.³

Social protection for families has three stated aims: to help defray the costs of having children through child benefits or allowances; to support women with maternity allowances and entitlement to leave (now widely extended to both parents); and to provide childcare assistance and help with caring for older or disabled family members. The need for child-care support arrangements and the right to leave to take care of

³ See, for example, the 1976 EU Council Directive on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women in access to employment, vocation training and promotion and working conditions, the Pregnancy Directive (1992), the recommendation on childcare (1992), the parental time directive (1996), the part-time work directive (1996) and the resolution on the balanced participation of women and men in family and working life (2000). <http://www.europa.eu.int/scadplus/leg/en/cha/>

children inform the EU Employment Strategy, which explicitly recognises that women still face special difficulties in entering the job market, career advancement and balancing work and family (CEC 1999).⁴ Childcare facilities, along with cash benefits and maternity and paternal leave and benefits, constitute most family policies.

Slow economic growth since the 1980s has however prevented rapid expansion of the welfare state. Cash support for families with children has stagnated or fallen in recent decades. The universal benefits that characterised the 1950s and early 1960s have increasingly given way to means-tested benefits. A means-test was imposed for example on the Allocation Parentale pour Jeunes Enfants in France in 1996, on parental cash leave benefits in Germany in 1994 and in Italy for all families with more than three children below 18 (Gauthier 2000). Luxembourg is targeting low-income families by reducing child tax allowances and increasing child benefits by an equivalent amount (CEC 1999).

The level of governmental involvement varies widely. Between 60 to 90 per cent of children 3-to-school age children in a number of countries were enrolled in publicly financed childcare institutions as of 1993, but coverage of children below 3 is much lower in all countries. By 1999, all countries had childcare leave (after childbirth) in their family policies but under widely differing terms and conditions, including pay, duration and flexibility (Gauthier 2000).

When parental leave legislation entitles families rather than individuals, and if paid benefits are relatively low, women more than men interrupt their employment to care for children. When the benefits are framed in terms of individual entitlement, as they are in Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands, women are still the majority of the beneficiaries, although more men take advantage of them. The policies thus may not always have their intended effects in terms of equalizing men and women's labour force participation, particularly re-entry after having a child (The World Bank 1999). The nature of the policies, with restrictions on eligibility and a ceiling on benefits, may limit their appeal. There is also a lack of substantive data on parents' and children's outcomes as a result of these policies and on the extent and type of support actually received by parents and families (Gauthier 2000).

The family/work landscape is considerably bleaker in countries with economies in transition in eastern and central Europe, where forces of transformation have wrought havoc with the relatively widespread and dependable childcare supports provided under communism. Across the region, transition has entailed a sharp decline in the availability of public nurseries and kindergartens and imposition of user fees, while the quality of services has often worsened. For families with young children, childcare costs can account for the biggest spending on services. With families mostly unable to pay the new fees in public facilities, demand has dropped and governments have even less incentive to

⁴ For example, the Commission's Guideline 20 of the *2000 Employment Guidelines* states: In order to strengthen equal opportunities, Member States and the social partners will design, implement and promote family-friendly policies including affordable, accountable and high quality care services for children and other dependants, as well as parental and other leave schemes. Guideline 21: The Member States will give specific attention to women, and men, considering a return to the paid workforce after an absence and, to that end, they will examine the means of gradually eliminating the obstacles in the way of such return.

commit more resources to childcare (UNICEF 1999). User fees apart, the inability of local authorities (to whom powers have devolved under decentralisation) to manage childcare centres, the lack of subsidised daycare at the workplace in private industry, and the failure of centre-based care to meet women's needs have all contributed to the overall drop in childcare centres and the rise in women's unemployment (Evans 1995a). Women's current high unemployment is a result of related factors: public sector downsizing, the shift of responsibility for childcare from the state to the family, and the avoidance of maternity benefits by private enterprises. In Bulgaria, women below 30 (prime childbearing years) constitute 70 per cent of unemployed women.

Many restructuring measures have directly or indirectly hit single working mothers the hardest. Georgia, for example, axed aid to single mothers in 1997. The free medical coverage and income tax exemption that replaced it the following year have not offset the loss of childcare support for single mothers. The number of pre-school facilities has fallen sharply, while those remaining charge fees that many single mothers cannot afford (UNICEF 2000d). In Russia, the social safety net that provided extensive free childcare and subsidies, including child allowances for female-headed households, no longer exists. Pre-transition, state and local government subsidies, as well as those from employers, covered most family childcare expenses. Cutbacks or elimination of almost all government subsidies have particularly affected low-income families and those with single mothers. Compounding the decline in childcare assistance are the sharp drop in the number of state childcare organisations and the rising cost of available kindergarten care. Preschoolers, who accounted for as many as 70 per cent of all children in 1989, were less than 30 per cent of the total in 1996 (Lokshin, Harris and Popkin 2000).

In the United States, government and employers are not major players in the provision of childcare. Public investment in childcare is about \$2 per child hour of enrollment, and nearly 80 per cent of childcare is paid for by parents. Finding quality childcare is a vexing concern: seven in ten centres, in one national survey, were found to provide mediocre care, and one in eight to endanger the health and safety of children (Grundy, Bell and Firestein 1999). Another 2001 study noted that there was little progress, despite a booming economy and initial disbursements of money from the national tobacco settlement, some of which is being channelled to childcare services.⁵

For families with children, childcare ranks as the fourth largest expenditure – after food, housing and taxes (Grundy, Bell and Firestein 1999). It is expensive for families whether they use centre or family care, whether they have infants, pre-schoolers or school-age children and whether they live in urban or rural areas. The average annual cost of childcare for a four-year-old at a childcare centre ranges between \$4,000 and \$6,000 a year, going up to \$10,000 in large metropolitan areas. This is more than the cost of annual public college tuition in all but one state.⁶

⁵ WorkingWoman.com, Eighth National Childcare Survey, by Sheryl Fragin; <http://www.workingwoman.com/wn/article>

⁶ Children's Defense Fund, *Report Finds the High Cost of Child Care Puts Quality Care Out of Reach for Many Families*, 11 December 2000; <http://www.childrensdefensefund.org/release001211.htm>

Federal and state programs assist low-income families in paying for childcare and funding. But this has not kept pace with the needs of low-income families. President George W. Bush's first budget in March 2001 proposed cuts in programs to provide childcare, prevent child abuse and train doctors at children's hospitals. If Congress approves, childcare grants stand to be cut by \$200 million. Congress had provided \$2 billion in 2000 for the Childcare and Development Block Grant. That was an increase of \$817 million to enable states to provide day care for an additional 241,000 children. President Bush also planned to axe \$20 million provided by Congress for an early learning fund to improve the quality of childcare and education for children younger than five.⁷

Earlier, under the Clinton Administration, childcare was dealt a mortal blow by the 1996 Temporary Assistance to Needy Families Act. TANF moved millions of women and families from government assistance programs, or welfare, into the labour market. Many former welfare recipients now work in low-wage jobs that lack health benefits, while the strict work requirements of TANF have dramatically increased the demand for childcare. At the same time, many former welfare recipients who previously served as childcare providers are now unavailable. TANF has left about one million more children without any type of childcare (ICRW 2000).

Single mothers experience special problems in combining unpaid care and employment. Responsive public childcare policies can have a transformative effect on their economic opportunities. A comparison of the status of single mothers in the U.S. and U.K, both of which have welfare-to-work programmes, with that in Sweden and Denmark is particularly instructive. The U.S., more so than the U.K, has treated single mothers as available for work, and imposed time-limited benefits. By contrast, in Sweden and Denmark, an extensive range of public care entitlements geared to children and older people backs the obligation to enter the labour market. Employment rates for single mothers are high in the U.S., but they are even higher in Sweden and Denmark, and poverty rates among single mothers in the latter countries are much lower than in the U.S. or the U.K (ILO 2001b).

6. Labour movements

The role of organised labour and international labour rights bodies is often a missing piece in development policy debates on childcare and family benefits. Yet a discussion of labour's potential in securing these benefits, and the State's enabling role, is critical in the current context of international production and employment patterns.

Current economic forces have no doubt dented labour's bargaining power in the workplace. For governments in increasing competition for floating business and capital, "competitiveness" is synonymous with slashing labour costs including benefits and

⁷ *The New York Times*, Bush's Budget Would Cut 3 Programs to Aid Children, by Robert Pear, 23 March 2001, p. 14.

wages (Rodrik 1997). This is starkly evident in the export-processing zones that have mushroomed in developing countries, where the terms and conditions of employment rarely meet established labour standards. Governments themselves may exempt companies from complying with these standards and bar union organising in the EPZs. State and public sector downsizing is often a non-negotiable component of structural adjustment programmes or other fiscal austerity policies. Trade unions increasingly identify privatisation trends, the competitive international environment, the spread of the informal sector with growing ranks of “atypical” workers, and changes in communications and production technologies as factors that make it harder for unions to organise and represent workers.

Advocacy of labour rights has proven to be a minefield in the international trade arena, meeting with active resistance from Southern governments – and NGOs – who view it as a protectionist strategy aimed at safeguarding Northern, mostly male factory jobs and blocking exports from key sectors of developing country economies.

Women's rights and grassroots labour advocates tend to be wary of an over-reliance on organised labour and international labour rights bodies – sometimes dubbed ‘labour elites’ – in safeguarding women's rights in the new economic environment. By implicitly assuming an established model of formal sector jobs, organised labour fails to take into account the multitudes of women in myriad temporary, part-time, “flexible,” home-based, intermittent or otherwise informal employment.

Feminist critiques of labour also point out that the focus on “core labour standards” – prompted by worldwide changes in production and employment patterns that have resulted in workers being recruited under precarious, hazardous and irregular conditions in developing countries – does not take into account concerns specific and critical to all women workers. For example, much of the international labour rights discourse is directed at young, single women employed in the *maquiladoras* or other sweatshops, who are only a small proportion of women workers worldwide.

Further, the ILO 1998 Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work defines four “core labour standards”: freedom of association and the right to bargain collectively, the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour, the effective abolition of child labour, and the elimination of employment discrimination. Such a definition reflects the principal concerns of organised labour, which represents employees in ILO's tripartite decision-making structure (whose other two elements are employers and governments). Women's labour advocates point out that the Declaration does not address adequate income, childcare needs, women's unpaid labour or the informal sector. Nor does it address health and safety or migrant workers' rights (of either women or men) or define sexual harassment as a discriminatory practice.⁸

⁸ Workers in the Global Economy, *Report on a Labour Rights-Women's Rights Advocacy Dialogue: Women's Rights and Labour Rights in Global Trade* (September 1999). <http://www.laborrights.org/projects/globalecon/women/index.html>

National and international organisations and other NGOs geared to the defence of women's rights have done much to advance pro-women legislation, particularly in the area of maternity protection. They have also moved to prevent a dilution of rights in the renegotiation of the 1954 ILO Maternity Protection Convention that resulted in a revised Convention in 2000 (No. 183).⁹ Unlike the previous Convention, which covered a narrow category of formal-sector workers, the new Convention applies to all workers, "including those in atypical forms of dependent work." While this is an advance, concerns remain over implementation, as they do over labour standards in general. The new Convention extends maternity leave from 12 to 14 weeks (still below the 16 weeks recommended by UNICEF). It also stipulates that leave benefits be provided through compulsory social insurance funds or public funds – a provision aimed at protecting women's labour market status by reducing resistance from employers.¹⁰

Similar criticism of a lack of explicit gender awareness can be levelled at several recent initiatives, such as voluntary codes of conduct, launched by consumer and international labour monitoring groups, to counteract the failure of many Southern governments to curb exploitative practices of transnational corporations that contract labour in their countries. These efforts, sometimes in partnership with companies, are aimed at improving labour conditions in developing countries by galvanising consumer awareness and action in Northern markets that matter the most.

For example, the charter of the non-profit Fair Labor Association (FLA), founded in Washington D.C. in 1998, creates a "first of a kind industry-wide code of conduct" and lays the foundation for a credible, independent monitoring system that will hold companies publicly accountable for their labour practices, as well as those of their principal contractors and suppliers around the world. The FLA workplace code of conduct has formulated a set of standards defining decent and humane working conditions. They cover forced labour, child labour, harassment or abuse, non-discrimination, health and safety, freedom of association and collective bargaining, wages and benefits, hours of work, and overtime compensation.¹¹

⁹ UNICEF and WHO, backed by several NGOs, intervened during discussions in the re-negotiation process to avert attempts, led by the employers' group, to restrict the rights of working mothers by moving the right to nursing breaks from the draft revised Convention (which becomes legally binding on ratifying States) to the non-binding draft Recommendation. UNICEF pointed out that the right to nursing breaks has existed since 1919.

¹⁰ International Labour Office, press release, *International Labour Conference adopts new Convention and Recommendation on Maternity Protection...* 15 June 1998. <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/inf/pr/2000/htm>

¹¹ FLA grew out of the Apparel Industry Partnership (AIP), launched by the White House in August 1996. AIP brought together apparel and footwear companies, human rights groups, labour unions, religious organisations, consumer advocates and universities in a collaborative effort to improve working conditions in factories in the United States and abroad and give consumers the information they need to make informed purchasing decisions. The four founding NGO members of FLA are the Lawyers Committee, the International Labour Rights Fund, the National Consumers League, and the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center for Human Rights. To date, 143 colleges and universities have affiliated with FLA to ensure company compliance with FLA principles and the workplace code of conduct. <http://www.fairlabor.org/html/amendctr/html> Some examples of other consensus standards are the Workers' Rights Consortium, University Students Against Sweatshops in the U.S. and the Ethical Trade

While there are appropriate and legitimate concerns over its record so far, the potential of organised labour in addressing women's issues in the current economic environment warrants closer scrutiny. By and large, trade unions remain highly patriarchal bodies with mostly male leaders who have not themselves experienced childcare problems. When women find their interests not represented, they stay away from union activity, citing family responsibilities (ICFTU 2001). The vicious cycle is complete with union leaders finding an absence of a clear impetus for childcare and sidelining it in bargaining.

But there are signs that the large networks are moving to raise women's representation in trade unions as well as reach out to women workers in the informal sector. A preliminary survey of the field suggests that work/family issues, including childcare, have moved up on labour agendas, although they are far from being consistent priorities. To ensure that gender concerns are systematically addressed in collective agreements, more than a third of unions and more than half of national centres affiliated to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), for example, have a policy to include women in collective bargaining teams. Issues related to maternity (breast feeding, paternity leave, special rights for pregnant women, childcare and parental leave) rate as the most frequent issues for inclusion in agreements (ILO 1999).

In the United States, 60 per cent of women with children under 5 are in the labour force, and nearly all of them identify affordable childcare as a serious problem. But large union networks have paradoxically found it difficult to mobilise women on the issue. Union members tend to rank childcare below equal pay and health care in a "hierarchy of needs" and are reluctant to ask for childcare on the job if their demands for basic wages and benefits are not met. There is also a widespread perception that the provision of childcare is a personal responsibility and not a public service. The notion that working parents are on their own is reinforced by employers who say they are "not in the business of child care" during contract negotiations and by the failure of legislatures to pass legislation for public funding of childcare programmes (Grundy, Bell and Firestein 1999). The poor support offered by government and employers to working mothers results in women leaving the labour market on having children and becoming downwardly mobile when they return to it. Research has shown that motherhood widens the wage gap between men and women in the U.S.: childless women currently earn 90 per cent of what their male counterparts earn, while mothers earn only 73 per cent.¹²

Despite the odds, women's organising is on the rise in almost every region of the world. As women grow more visible in the workforce, they are starting to become more assertive economic actors and joining and forming unions in greater numbers and championing causes most important to them. Trade union density (union members as a proportion of the labour force) is higher for men than women in almost all regions of the

Initiative in the U.K.; the Maquila Solidarity Network in Canada aims at promoting improved working conditions in *maquiladoras* and EPZs.

¹² *The New York Times*, op-ed page, *Have a Child, and Experience the Wage Gap*, by Sylvia Anne Hewlett, May 16, 2000, summarising the findings of a Rand Corporation study on women's downward mobility in the labour market after childbearing, and another by Jane Waldfogel, an economist at Columbia University, on motherhood and the gender wage gap.

world. But women's unionisation exceeds that of men in high-unionisation countries such as Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden.¹³ After a slowdown in the early years of transition, women's trade union membership in European countries with transition economies is surging again. Most of the unions established since 1990 affiliated to ICFTU are in the transition and newly democratic countries. ICFTU has set up a women's network in the central and eastern European (CEE) States for women who enjoyed benefits such as crèche facilities and long maternity leave in the socialist system but are now back to fighting for basics. Worldwide, 40 per cent (or 60 million) of ICFTU's 156 million members are women.¹⁴

At the Union Network International (UNI), a global union with 1,000 affiliates and 900,000 members, a Global Equality Project has been in existence since the mid-90s to involve more women in decision-making. In general women's union membership has been going up and is up to 61 per cent among UNI affiliates in Europe.¹⁵

The very factors that make women the most vulnerable workers in the global economy – employment at the margin and lack of standard labour protection – are providing the impetus for women's organising at both national and regional levels. In Asia, the financial crisis, which has disproportionately affected women, has been a critical factor in women's organising. The Bangkok-based Committee on Asian Women Workers and Manila-based GABRIELA in Asia are some examples of regional coalitions that are gaining in strength as watchdog and resource groups that also back country-level union activity.

The Korean Women's Trade Union (WTU) was founded in 1999 to make the concerns of women workers, who are 40 per cent of the labour force in the Republic of Korea, priorities of the labour movement. A primary concern is childcare: research and public hearings prior to the union's establishment showed a strong demand for childcare centres. The WTU leadership asserts that such issues, which should be concerns of both men and women but are always left out of labour negotiations, must be taken on board if workers are to make a proper living. The new union aims to be a forum for all women workers, and will in particular take up cudgels for those who are unemployed or work at temporary jobs, who are the majority.¹⁶

In the Philippines, women's trade union membership increased between 1988 and 1993. But women's leadership in unions remains low.¹⁷ The rapid growth of Cambodia's garment industry, now the country's biggest export earner, has galvanised a fledgling union movement that has managed to raise the monthly minimum wage after a series of

¹³ European Industrial Relations Observatory (2000), *Gender Perspectives: Annual Update 2000*; <http://www.eiro.eurofound.ie/2001/03/updates/tn0103201u.html>

¹⁴ Interview with Elsa Ramos, Director, Equality and Youth, ICFTU.

¹⁵ Union Network International. <http://www.union-network.org>

¹⁶ Inter Press Service (1999), *South Korea: Women Union Leaders Flex Muscle*, by Prangtip Daorueng, 20 September 1999. <http://www.corpwatch.org/trac/corner/worldnews/other/464.html>

¹⁷ Committee on Asian Women, Asian Women Workers Newsletter (October 2000), *Globalisation's Scourge: The Impact of Globalisation on Women's Employment in the Philippines*. <http://caw.jinbo.net/awwnoct2000.html>

confrontational strikes. The actions of the Free Trade Union of the Workers of the Kingdom of Cambodia have helped empower poorly educated rural women, who are the majority of cheap labour at garment factories supplying big American retailers.¹⁸

In El Salvador, the Committee of Salvadoran Women Workers (COMUTRAS), set up by 26 women who lost their jobs for trying to set up trade unions in the *maquilas*, has brought before the courts more than 300 cases of women workers dismissed for trying to improve working conditions. Trade unions remain outlawed, despite the application of Salvadoran labour laws in the *maquilas* since 1997. But COMUTRAS leaders have been instrumental in getting an eight-hour, five-day week in the companies where their unions are present. They have also secured social security, part payment for lunches and double wages for Saturday work, and set up a first crèche (ICFTU 1999).

In Brazil, women workers in industry, especially in the electro-electronics sector, were active in trade union struggles in the early 1980s that strengthened perceptions of the preschool as a right of the working mother. One of their principal demands, observed more in the breach, was that firms respect a 1943 labour law that stipulated provision of preschools for children of workers (ILO 2001a).

Women are also forming their own unions when those in women-dominated export-oriented sectors such as textiles and garments do not adequately represent work/family concerns. The Bangladesh Independent Garment Workers' Federation is one example. Women formed BIGUF to better address issues such as the provision of a day nursery in the factories, remedial learning classes for workers older than 14, and sexual harassment at the workplace.¹⁹

In the United States, women's growing presence in the paid labour force and in the unions and rising activism within union ranks have spurred greater commitment and advocacy of childcare. Unions affiliated with the American Federation of Labour-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), which counts 5.5 million women among its members, are securing a range of childcare options for their members through bargaining. Resource and referral programmes, childcare tax programmes and funds and childcare centres, networks of family day care homes and subsidised slots are some childcare benefits that member unions have negotiated nationwide.²⁰

¹⁸ Committee on Asian Women, Asian Women Workers Newsletter (October 2000), *Cambodian Labour at the Low End of Industry*, citing Grant Peck of the Associated Press in *The Nation*, 24 August 2000. <http://caw.jinbo.net/awwnoct2000.html>

¹⁹ International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), *Garments "Made in Bangladesh": The Social Reality Behind the Label*, Report produced by Samuel Grumiau for ICFTU with the assistance of the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation and the support of the national trade union centres LO (Norway) and FNV (The Netherlands). <http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991212341&Language=EN>

²⁰ The Labor Project for Working Families and the AFL-CIO Working Women's Department (1998), *Bargaining for Childcare*, Fact Sheet. For example, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 1245 negotiated the establishment of a childcare resource and referral programme for employees of Pacific Gas & Electric. It provides a childcare referral hotline and information to help employees evaluate caregivers. Under the Dependent Care Assistance Plan (DCAP), the International Union of Electrical Workers and General Electric set up by contract a dependent care reimbursement account allowing eligible

A 1998 study of major contracts of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), covering 70 per cent of its 1.3 million members, found that the majority have some type of benefit to help them with family responsibilities.²¹

The Satellite Day Care Program (SDC), tackles two problems at once – the lack of work for people coming off welfare and the lack of affordable, quality child care. SDC trainees who complete a 12-week program can set up family childcare programmes in their homes and become employees of the day care agency they interned at. An SDC childcare provider receives a starting salary of \$18,200, health insurance, pension, vacation, education and other benefits. This is more than twice what independent family day care providers are paid.²²

While acknowledging factors that make childcare a tough sell, labour advocates in the United States emphasise that unions can and must do more to raise its profile on several fronts. They can, for example, conduct internal education campaigns to help members see childcare as a “public good” and a basic right to be provided by their employers or as a public service, place child care in a package of family-friendly supports that could include paid family leave, alternative work schedules, educational benefits and retirees’ programmes, and build broad-based coalitions with childcare advocates that can catalyse greater labour union activism (Grundy, Bell and Firestein 1999). A frequently cited example of such a coalition effort is the New York City Labour Coalition for Childcare which won \$177 million in childcare funding from the state legislature in 1999. The coalition seeks state subsidies for 50,000 additional childcare slots for working families, more childcare centres and better childcare training for workers.²³

Coalition-building at multiple levels between unions, international watchdog groups and NGOs can also work to the advantage of women contract workers in developing countries for transnational corporations. For example, although childcare does not explicitly find a place in the FLA charter, it is listed under “additional non-wage benefits” in a 50-page audit instrument that independent monitors use when they inspect companies and try to detect discrimination. In countries where enforcement of labour laws is lax and women’s unionisation weak, strategic partnerships between labour groups

employees a pre-tax deduction of up to \$5,000 a year. Funds in the account can be used to reimburse employees for day care for children or other dependent care. The 1199 Health and Human Services Employees Union negotiated a childcare fund in 1989, which had expanded by 1992 to cover 168 hospitals and health care facilities and 39,000 members. Employers contribute a percentage of gross payroll to the fund. Benefits include cash vouchers for childcare and after-school care, summer camp subsidies, childcare resource and referral services and a childcare center.

²¹ American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), communication from Joyce Long, women’s rights programme coordinator, 19 March 2001.

²² American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), *Guide to Winning Work/Family Programs*.

²³ American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) *Guide to Winning Work/Family Programs*. The coalition comprises AFSCME District Councils 37 and 1707 and New York City unions under the auspices of the New York State AFL-CIO and the New York City Central Labour Council. <http://www.afscme.org/wrkplace/wfp07.htm>

and local NGOs can help address women's concerns. In Bangladesh, for example, some factories now boast childcare facilities thanks to the initiative and entrepreneurship of a local NGO, Phulki. Factory managers, given the class and cultural divide that separates them from the workers, don't engage in a gender analysis of turnover; they are generally prepared to offer childcare facilities only if it helps the bottom line and costs the company nothing. Recently accredited by the FLA as an independent monitor, Phulki has done a good job of persuading factories to provide childcare. It raises donor funds to provide trained child minders for childcare facilities; all that the companies do is provide space.²⁴

Liz Claiborne, an American retailer of women's apparel, has also begun to support the efforts of local organisations to provide daycare and women's health services for women factory workers in contracting companies. It has provided a small grant to an NGO to provide childcare at a garment factory in the Dominican Republic. The impetus for such funding often comes from Liz Claiborne country offices, from local projects that may address concerns of its factory workers, and sometimes from the factories themselves in the 35 countries in which Liz Claiborne contracts its work, providing the company an opportunity to be a vehicle to work with government or the community.²⁵

Such fledgling projects suggest that transnational corporations – motivated variously by consumer awareness campaigns, concerns over productivity and turnover, or plain public relations – are recognising the importance of socially responsible business. In the 1990s, there has been a resurgence of activism around codes of conduct for corporations that have emerged as a response to the globalization of the marketplace. The emphasis is on a set of rules that propose a new relationship between nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), businesses and governments – instead of a focus on intergovernmental codes and systems of government sanctions proposed in the 1970s.²⁶ The FLA charter – which took four years of negotiations – has so far signed on seven apparel and footwear companies that operate 3,000 factories in 60 countries and together have \$27 billion in business.²⁷ Given time and commitment, these consensus standards can potentially improve the working conditions of the millions of women who are the majority of the multinational labour force. Collaborative partnerships – such as a social standards working group of 13 contracting companies mooted by FLA in Bangladesh – can be a start in ensuring that globalisation is not necessarily a race to the bottom in working conditions.

The spotlight on transnational corporations by trade unions and the international labour movement cannot however be allowed to obscure the appalling labour conditions in the domestic sector. In Bangladesh, for example, the clothing sector for the domestic market has to meet the needs of 125 million people and is key to the economy, but attracts little international attention. Yet thousands of women and children work in it in miserable

²⁴ Interview with Auret van Heerden, Fair Labor Association.

²⁵ Interviews with Melanie Lyons and Daryl Brown of Liz Claiborne.

²⁶ Interhemispheric Resource Center (October 1997), Bulletin 47-48, Corporate Codes of Conduct.

²⁷ The companies are adidas-Salomon, Kathie Lee Gifford, Levi Strauss & Co., Liz Claiborne, Nike, Phillips Van Heusen and Reebok.

conditions: tiny workshops, non-compliance with health and safety standards, long hours, no days off, and poor pay.²⁸

Further, domestic labour organisations, in ideology and practice, can be complicit with employers in denying women access to childcare by failing to provide labour rights education for workers. Studies in India and Sri Lanka, for example, have found that compliance with national laws requiring tea plantations to provide on-site childcare facilities for their employees was very low (Shantha 1997; ILO 1996). In one survey of 490 tea plantations, only 250-300 had crèches, in which only half of all eligible children were enrolled. In another study in Sri Lanka, researchers found that both employers and trade unions failed to inform employees and members about their labour rights, including maternity-related leave and benefits (Jayaweera and Sanmugam 1996).

7. Childcare workers

The phenomenal rise in the number of women in the labour force have generated childcare work, paid or unpaid, for millions of other women in family, community or institutional settings in their home countries and overseas. The expansion of the childcare workforce is both a cause and consequence of women's labour force participation. The rights of this category of worker cannot be overlooked in policy and advocacy directed at working mothers and their children.

When women have few viable childcare options, they turn to immediate or extended family members, usually a mother, mother-in-law, grandmother, older daughters or teenage relatives. Women may often prefer to leave their children with such caregivers they trust, rather than with maids or at daycare centres and crèches. While advantageous to the working mother, such childcare services can be an added unpaid household chore for women and girls, at the cost of their own rights to health and rest or education and employment. In several developing countries, the traditional reliance on unpaid family providers has increased as a result of the retreat of the state from public services and women's induction into the labour force in new forms of employment. For example, childcare costs in public and new private facilities in countries in transition have made working families revert to relatives, especially in the Caucasus, former Yugoslavia and Central Asia, where the extended family structure is still intact (UNICEF 1999). In countries such as Sri Lanka and Malaysia, where women are finding paid work in manufacturing and factory jobs, fewer among them are willing to work as housemaids and child-minders (Ta and Radzi 1993).

Outside the family, the range of community-based, quasi-public and other arrangements that provide the bulk of childcare services in developing countries have created cadres of low-paid childcare workers unprotected by government or labour regulations. In industrialised nations that provide limited state support for childcare, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, as well as in some Gulf states, such workers may include

²⁸ International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation, *Global Unions Report*, 21 February 2001; <http://www.icftu.org>

“nannies” who are increasingly a feature of affluent and/or dual-income families, especially in metropolitan areas. In the European Union, changing employment patterns and family structures and the uneven nature of public childcare provision have rapidly transformed childcare (along with other household services such as care of the elderly, catering, and domestic cleaning and maintenance) to a growth sector. EU policymakers emphasise the importance of a quality infrastructure of care services on several grounds: promoting women’s employment, reconciling work and family responsibilities, combating social exclusion of the very young and the elderly and, not least of all, creating jobs (Cancedda 2000).²⁹

At least three sets of concerns arise out of the expansion of the household service sector. First is the high probability of creating low-skill, low-pay and low-status jobs in the absence of appropriate regulation. The possibility of substituting paid work with unpaid work keeps labour costs low, while the resemblance between household services and previously unpaid “non-work” activities gives such employment low status. Second is the high proportion of women in the service sector, which raises the issue of gender segregation of labour: if it is women who are still doing “housework,” now for pay, the household service sector does not redress the imbalance of home responsibilities between the sexes. A third and related concern is the extent to which those who lighten the burden of household and care-giving of their employers to enable them to bridge their personal and professional spheres may disrupt the balance between their own work and family lives (Cancedda 2000).

These are increasingly the realities of childcare workers worldwide, who are part of an expanding and mostly unregulated female workforce susceptible to multiple forms of discrimination and abuse, ranging from poor pay and long working hours with little or no vacation, sick leave or health insurance to physical or sexual violence and even death at the hands of the families they work for. Expatriate women workers from labour-exporting countries often endure any or all of these violations, with the added threat of deportation when they are not legally documented. Discriminatory labour and immigration laws in receiving countries can result in compulsory pregnancy tests for foreign domestic workers (for example, in Singapore) and immediate deportation if found pregnant and deportation after a maximum of two weeks upon termination of a contract (for example, in Hong Kong). Foreign domestic workers are also not covered by the labour laws in most receiving countries (barring Hong Kong and Canada).³⁰

Given that most childcare workers are women with children of their own, their rights to basic health and wellbeing, as well as those of the children they may leave uncared for, warrant greater attention in childcare policy and advocacy. The Philippines is a case in point. There are more than four million overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) working in

²⁹ The “fourth pillar” of the EU Employment Strategy, ‘Strengthening the policies for equal opportunities,’ includes four guidelines: gender mainstreaming, tackling gender gaps, reconciling work and family life, and facilitating re-entry into the labour market.

³⁰ KANLUNGAN Centre Foundation (an NGO working to advance the rights and interests of overseas Filipino workers, particularly women, and their families) (2000), *Fast Facts on Filipino Labour Migration*. In 1999, Hong Kong was the top receiving country for Filipino domestic workers. Other countries were Canada, Israel, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Spain, Taiwan and the United Arab Emirates.

130 countries. In 1999, 91 per cent of newly deployed service workers were women. Nearly two-thirds were domestic workers (performing household chores and taking care of children), 98.5 per cent of whom were women.³¹ Of the 2,000 Filipinos who leave the country every day to work abroad, 1,200 are women.³² Women not only account for most foreign remittances – as much as 71 per cent of earnings in 1991, by one estimate – but pay a much harder price in absentee motherhood. According to government figures, there are more than a million children of OFWs growing up in single-parent families, subject to rape and incest, substance abuse, alcoholism and other forms of delinquency (UNICEF 2000e).³³ Other preliminary estimates for 1999 place the number of OFW children aged 0-17 years closer to 6 million, of whom more than 2.2 million were aged 0-4 years and 1.6 million 5-9 years. Chronic malnutrition, emotional stress, early pregnancies and marriages and domestic violence are other problems faced by children of OFWs that are being identified for immediate intervention.³⁴

In the United States, childcare workers, 98 per cent of whom are women, earn on average only \$6.12 an hour – less than parking lot and gas station attendants, vehicle washers and pest controllers. Nearly a third of them earn only the minimum wage (\$5.15 an hour) and a fourth hold second jobs. Family childcare workers – who provide care in their own homes – illustrate the difficulties women face in much home-based work: they earn a median income below the poverty line for a one-person household (\$6,136 a year), the unregulated among them earn about \$1,000 less after expenses, and seven out of ten work more than 40 hours a week (at roughly \$3 an hour). Less than one-third of child-care centres provide health insurance for workers and only 18 per cent offer fully-paid health coverage. The low pay and lack of basic benefits has led to a high turnover rate among childcare workers – more than four times that for public school teachers.³⁵

The largely unregulated nature of the US childcare workforce and the dispersion of its workers have made organising difficult. Less than five per cent of childcare workers belongs to a union, but there are indications that this could change (Grundy, Bell and Firestein 1999). Nannies hired by high-income families in the US have also felt the need to form networks to establish some form of regulation on qualifications of nannies and placement agencies.³⁶

³¹ KANLUNGAN Centre Foundation (2000), *Fast Facts on Filipino Labour Migration*.

³² Committee on Asian Women, Asian Women Workers Newsletter (October 2000), *Globalisation's Scourge: The Impact of Globalisation on Women's Employment in the Philippines*. <http://caw.jinbo.net/awwnoct2000.html>

³³ UNICEF (2000), The Philippines National Report on the Follow-Up to the World Summit for Children, 2000.

³⁴ Kakammpi (an organization of overseas Filipino workers, returnees and their families), Estimating Baseline Figures on Children of Overseas Filipino Workers. The estimates were generated from family demographic characteristics established by the 1993 and 1999 Survey of Overseas Filipinos, the 1995 Census, the 1997 Family and Income Expenditure Survey, the 1998 Annual Poverty Indicators Survey and the Philippines Overseas Employment Agency statistics on overseas migration (various years).

³⁵ AFL-CIO Working Women's Department, *Equal Pay Alert! Child Care Workers Earn Less Than Parking Lot Attendants*.

³⁶ The International Nanny Association, for example, is a 16-year-old umbrella group in the United States for nannies, agencies, families, training programmes and other related service providers. INA has 550 members, about 50 of them from countries such as Australia, New Zealand and Japan. INA aims to reach

8. Conclusions

Women's growing labour force participation has occurred in spite of the lack of formal and dependable arrangements for childcare provision. Market liberalisation and economic restructuring processes that increase demands on household income have heightened women's obligation to take up paid work without significant reallocation of their household and caregiving duties. Affordable and accessible childcare support, in the form of daycare, leave and cash benefits, can greatly enhance women's ability to choose employment and maximise opportunities for economic and professional advancement. This is especially crucial given current production and employment trends that draw women in overwhelming numbers into the informal sector, in part-time and home-based work that often exacerbates their share of unpaid labour.

Clear public commitment and policies that are attentive to how care is shared can open up greater possibilities of genuine choice for women and men and lead to a more equitable division of responsibilities. Childcare support is not likely to entirely ease women's caregiving responsibilities unless it is part of a framework of responsive basic social services. Women are still principal caregivers, whether paid or unpaid. In this context, the growth of a mainly female childcare workforce in response to women's labour force participation has important policy implications for child development.

In countries with economies in transition, the collapse of paternalistic state provisions of social support has exacted an immense toll in women's employment and children's wellbeing. But the challenge can be transformed into an opportunity to re-appraise the extent and nature of previous support and devise more versatile approaches, with a range of actors, which better address women's diverse labour market demands and changing family structures.

In developing countries as a whole, the role traditionally performed by community service and other voluntary sectors in childcare has been greatly enlarged by the retreat of the state from social welfare. NGOs in many developing countries play a catalytic and multifaceted role in childcare provision. They serve as a liaison between the state and society by clearly articulating demands and enabling their implementation, often by providing technical, financial and administrative support in collaboration with public sector bodies. National and international NGOs geared to the defence of children's rights in particular have been involved in providing support services for community pre-schools and training teachers. The perception that the voluntary sector is less corrupt, more efficient and better aware of the realities of the poor has generated rising expectations that their actions are more likely to reach those most in need (ILO 2001a). While community organisations play an unquestionably vital role, the absence of government oversight and accountability mechanisms can perpetuate the low-status, low-pay and low-quality characteristics of childcare provision.

the estimated one million nannies working in American families, a number of them illegally, to form a support network. www.internationalnannyassociation.com

Along with NGOs, trade unions have key functions in securing childcare rights. The labour movement is increasingly grappling with the forces of liberalisation – in particular, the downsizing of the state and public sector and the creation of vast swathes of informal-sector workers who cannot be organised – that have eroded its bargaining power. Although union leadership remains overwhelmingly male, there are attempts to actively engage and recruit women by addressing their concerns. Simultaneously, women workers in many countries are raising their profile, often forming their own unions to demand better working conditions, defying perceptions that rising labour costs could reduce the appeal of cheap female labour for multinational corporations. The small successes attributable to a resurgence of union activity in a climate not conducive to it underline the important role of unions in securing and safeguarding the rights of working women. They suggest that organised labour must no longer be absent in childcare policy discussions.

Union pressures, consumer awareness campaigns and enlightened self-interest are beginning to have a salutary effect on the behaviour patterns of transnational corporations that contract labour in developing countries. The changes may yet be barely perceptible. But given that a single American retailer of apparel or footwear can be an employer of factory workers in as many as 35 countries, the tentative interest shown by TNCs in addressing women's workplace concerns can be trend-setting for both the private and public sector and influence labour standards across regions. Emerging code of conduct initiatives attest to the importance of continued monitoring, advocacy and coalition-building within and between countries of the North and South.

The dramatic changes in women's employment over the last two decades call for a re-assessment of child-caring responsibilities. Governments, labour movements, community and women's organisations must together and individually formulate workplace and public policy measures that can lead to the globalisation of affordable and quality childcare.

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