

SDG Champions

2024

BOGOTA

Bogota's Care System: A commitment to gender equality

- **DURATION**
Ongoing
- **POPULATION 2024**
7.901.653 (Growth Rate 1.31%)
- **URA SCOPE**
SOCIETY. Staying Human
- **TOPICS**
CAREGIVING, EMPOWERMENT, EQUALITY, WELL-BEING
- **MAIN ACTORS**
Secretaría Distrital de la Mujer
Operación Sonrisa
Fundación Bolívar
Oriéntame

In the heart of Bogotá, a city bustling with life and promise, a profound shift is quietly taking place—a transformation that seeks to reshape the way care is valued, shared, and distributed. At the forefront of this movement is the Women's Affairs Secretariat, a governmental entity with a mission to advance gender equality and women's rights. Their latest initiative, the Care System, is not just a policy; it is a vision, a commitment to ensuring that the burden of care no longer falls disproportionately on women's shoulders.

The numbers tell a stark story: 30% of Bogotá's women are full-time unpaid caregivers. Among them, 90% live in low-income households, 33% struggle to find time for self-care, and 70% have only completed primary school. These statistics reveal an unspoken truth: while women carry the weight of caregiving, they are often left without the means or opportunities for personal growth, well-being, or financial independence.

In response to this, the Care System was born. Its aim? To bring care to the centre of urban planning, weaving it into the very fabric of the city's development. Through this initiative, Bogotá is working to coordinate and expand care services in ways that balance the needs of both those who require care and the caregivers themselves.

The goal is to lighten the load for women, freeing up time for self-development, rest, income generation, and leisure—all the things that have long been sacrificed in the name of caregiving.

The Care System is not just about services; it's about recognition, redistribution, and transformation. It seeks to acknowledge the invaluable contributions of caregivers, while also pushing for a more equitable sharing of caregiving responsibilities. In practice, this means that while a caregiver enrolls in a program to finish her high school education, her grandchild can engage in activities designed for children—including those with physical or cognitive disabilities. This system nurtures both the caregivers and those they care for.

But it doesn't stop there. The Care System is also a tool for cultural change. Workshops designed for men invite them to take on household tasks—ironing, cooking, baby care—activities that have traditionally been seen as a woman's responsibility. These workshops challenge long-standing notions about gender roles, teaching participants about the deep impact of the gender division of labour and how it shapes our society. All these services—whether educational, cultural, or recreational—are provided free of charge and open to all.





Impact

The Care System in Bogotá has made significant strides in service delivery, governance, and social impact. As of March 2024, the system operates 23 Care Blocks, alongside Care Buses, Home Assistance, and other units, collectively providing 3,934,104 care services to 687,127 people between March 2021 and March 2024.

In terms of education and empowerment, over 37,984 people have graduated from high school, received complementary education, or obtained knowledge certification. Additionally, 29,654 women and their families have participated in cultural transformation workshops, with 6,093 men engaging in these sessions aimed at challenging traditional gender roles and promoting new masculinities. The system has also fostered well-being by involving 173,088 people, including 33,799 women, in recreational activities such as sports and dance.

The Care System has made efforts to ease the daily burdens of caregiving as well. 3,849 people have used community laundries, freeing up 905 days for caregivers. Through targeted programs, women and their families have gained knowledge on accessing employment pathways in Bogotá. Additionally, 5,528 boys and girls have participated in arts-based activities, creating opportunities for personal expression and growth, while also liberating 934 days for caregivers.

By easing the caregiving load and offering women more opportunities for personal and professional growth, the Care System strives to improve women's well-being, empower them, and foster a more equitable society.

A key development is the creation of InfoCuidado, an information platform consolidating data from nine sectors of the District Administration. It tracks both the services provided and the individuals served, contributing to intersectoral coordination and monitoring.

Governance-wise, the Care System has been incorporated into Bogotá's Master Plan, with an institutional structure consisting of three bodies: an intersectoral political governance body, a management body, and a body ensuring social participation. These efforts have helped ensure the system's political sustainability and long-term success.

The Challenge

Bogotá faces a critical challenge in addressing the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work that falls primarily on women, limiting their access to education, economic opportunities, and overall well-being. Nearly 30% of women in the city are full-time unpaid caregivers, a role that often leaves them with little time or energy to pursue personal development, education, or enter the labour market. This cycle of time poverty creates significant barriers, as women in caregiving roles are unable to improve their education—often only having completed primary school—while also facing physical and emotional strain from constant caregiving duties.

The burden of care work is particularly heavy for women in low-income households, with 33% of them lacking time for self-care and nearly 70% trapped in a cycle of poverty. This not only diminishes their autonomy but also restricts their social and economic mobility, reinforcing deep-rooted gender inequalities.

The Care System in Bogotá seeks to address this by redistributing caregiving responsibilities and offering essential support services. It provides access to education, vocational training, and well-being activities while engaging men in cultural transformation workshops to share caregiving duties.

Solution Proposed

The Care System in Bogotá is an innovative initiative aimed at addressing the issue of unpaid care work, which disproportionately affects women. By recognizing, redistributing, and reducing this burden, it supports the 5th Sustainable Development Goal: "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls." This program integrates care into urban planning, fostering social and environmental justice while promoting women's social and political participation.

The initiative focuses on three main goals:

Recognize: Highlight the importance of care work, making it visible and socially valued. **Redistribute:** Share care responsibilities fairly among all members of society. **Reduce:** Decrease the amount of time women spend on unpaid care work to empower their personal growth and autonomy.

The Care System serves three groups:

Caregivers: Offers education, vocational training, health services, and income opportunities. **People in need of care:** Provides professional care and recreational activities for children, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities. **Men and the community:** Encourages shared caregiving roles through workshops and campaigns to promote cultural change.

To enhance accessibility, it employs three strategies: Care Blocks, Care Buses and Home Assistance.