All over the world every day, women go off to work to farms and factories, to school rooms and board rooms. For an increasing number of parents, finding quality affordable childcare remains a serious issue, particularly given urbanization and migration away from extended family. The triple benefits of childcare are clear: good care can support child development; address gender equality and help the economy of a community and country grow.

Before the pandemic, we were beginning to see a growing focus on childcare. New studies were emerging, and policy papers were documenting the potential positive impact of public and private investment in quality care. Over the last few months, the COVID crises has reinforced how dependent families around the world have become on childcare – families who have to work often turn to childcare, particularly when schools close – yet too often, supports have not been available to assure protection for essential child care workers.

The need for childcare is becoming more and more apparent. In 76 low and middle income countries, just over one in five children under age five lacked adult supervision for at least an hour in a given week (UNICEF 2017). Moreover, too often, older siblings – particularly girls – are forced to drop out of school due to the demands of caring for younger siblings.

In 2018, global female labor force participation stood at 48 percent, compared with 75 percent for men (World Bank 2019). Yet there is mounting evidence that access to childcare can help support greater employment opportunities for women, which in turn is good for the economy.

Childcare can be provided in many different settings and is called different things in different countries. Types of childcare tend to fall into three categories: center-based care, home-based and more informal family arrangements

- **Center-based care**: Centers providing care for young children are generally called childcare or day care centers, nurseries, or crèches. Preschools and kindergartens can also serve a childcare function.
- **Home-based care**: Broadly speaking, home-based care falls into two types: childcare provided for a group of children in a caregiver’s home or the care by someone in the child’s own home, sometimes called a nanny or au pair.
- **Family arrangements**: Care provided by members of the family (for example grandparents, aunts, uncles and other relatives)

Naturally, care of any type may not fit in any one discrete category; and many children are in multiple types of arrangements across a day or week.

Regardless of the childcare setting, the hours children are in care provide an opportunity to promote the core elements of nurturing care: assuring safety and security, providing access to nutrition and good health, encouraging parent engagement and early learning, and making connections for families to other social supports in the community.

The need for childcare is a 21st century reality for families around the world. We have to join hands and help assure that the care for our youngest children provides quality, is affordable and recognizes and supports the childcare workforce. We will need a chorus of voices to expand public and private policies and resources to reach these goals. It is an opportunity we cannot afford to miss.

**References**:
