

URUGUAY A national approach to care

Decades of powerful feminist advocacy on care, combined with a stable political environment, robust economy, and ageing population, all contributed to the Uruguayan government launching a pioneering and comprehensive approach in 2015: the Sistema Nacional Integrado de Cuidados (SNIC) (National Integrated Care System). Feminist movements have played a crucial role in placing care firmly on the political agenda to enable recent progress on access to care and in broader labour rights. They continue to call for a transformation in care-related social norms and for accountability for SNIC commitments to all groups within Uruguay.

Feminist activism and influence: the foundations of the SNIC

Decades of collaborative efforts and interconnected networks have been the backbone of Uruguayan feminist movements, fostering a comprehensive approach to addressing gender equality issues. Alliances like La Red Género y Familia (Gender and Family Network) have brought together women's movements, female politicians and feminist academics to ensure that care and labor rights are firmly embedded in both public discourse and political agendas.

In the public sphere, their endeavors have propelled discussions on women's labor rights into the forefront of social dialogue, particularly concerning the distribution and recognition of care responsibilities. Their advocacy was supported by a growing body of evidence from institutions like the University of the Republic and the national statistics office, which have sought to quantify gender gaps in unpaid work and the country's 'care deficit'.

Continuous engagement between groups like La Red Género y Familia—later evolved into La Red ProCuidados—and the ruling political party and government has been a pivotal strategy, ensuring care and labor rights are firmly placed on the political agenda. As early as 2008, a commitment to a national care system formed a part of the electoral campaign of the political party, Frente Amplio, which held power between 2005-2020.

Care on the political agenda

Following sustained engagement with feminist actors, the Uruguayan government established the SNIC in 2015, and with it, positioned care as a societal, rather than private, issue. This established care as a national priority, essential to the progression of human rights and enshrined in law as the "legal right to care and be cared for". The National Care Plan 2016-2020 had three key provisions: 1) care for children under three; 2) care for elderly people and those with disabilities; and 3) professionalization of the paid care workforce.

In designing this first national plan, the government had held a national dialogue to raise awareness of care, share information on the proposed system, and to

better understand how local realities might influence approaches. This participatory approach boosted the project's visibility and credibility.

Increased access to care

The annual spending on services under the SNIC was USD 206 million in 2019, roughly 1.5 per cent of total public social expenditure. The National Care Plan for 2021-2025 emphasizes reducing the significant gaps in access to care. Data from 2022 suggest progress towards this goal: total public coverage of care for children under three due to the SNIC was over 78,000 in 2022, an overall coverage rate of 53 per cent of the target population, up from 43 per cent in 2019. These improvements are worth celebrating, and the SDG Gender Index score for wage equality in Uruguay has also improved by six points in recent years (while remaining "poor" at just 61 out of 100 points).



Not all women have the same information and not all of them want the same thing, when we make the intersections by race, by territory, and by migrant status, this gets deeper because some groups, such as trans people, have been left out of the SNIC. We don't talk about this, we don't touch it.

— Member of CLADEM Uruguay and president of the Afro-descendant institute for study, research and development

National feminist actors also highlighted that social norms related to care work in Uruguay remain conservative and that work to shift this has been an ongoing challenge.

The continued role of feminist actors and allies within and outside of government is critical to achieve better and more inclusive systems for care workers and those receiving care, as well as wider public engagement on the norm change needed to truly transform care across society.

Continuing roles for feminist movements to drive progress

Feminist actors interviewed for this research highlighted continued challenges for individuals experiencing multiple disadvantages who do not fit as easily into the predefined categories of the SNIC, such as those with irregular immigration status. They emphasized the importance of representation from marginalized groups during conversations shaping SNIC implementation, especially on the trade-offs between a universal program and targeted support to those most impacted by care burdens.



Equal marriage, the Law for Trans People, the Law of Affirmative Actions for Afro Descendants, the National Gender Law, the National Care System,...we have everything! But Uruguayan culture has not changed. So men are not seen as caregivers.

— Member of CLADEM Uruguay and president of the Afro-descendant institute for study, research and development