

Scuola Normale Superiore 2026
Spring School 2026, Political Economy of Production and Labour

19 March Thursday, Labour Studies Today

The purple economy: gender, care and labour

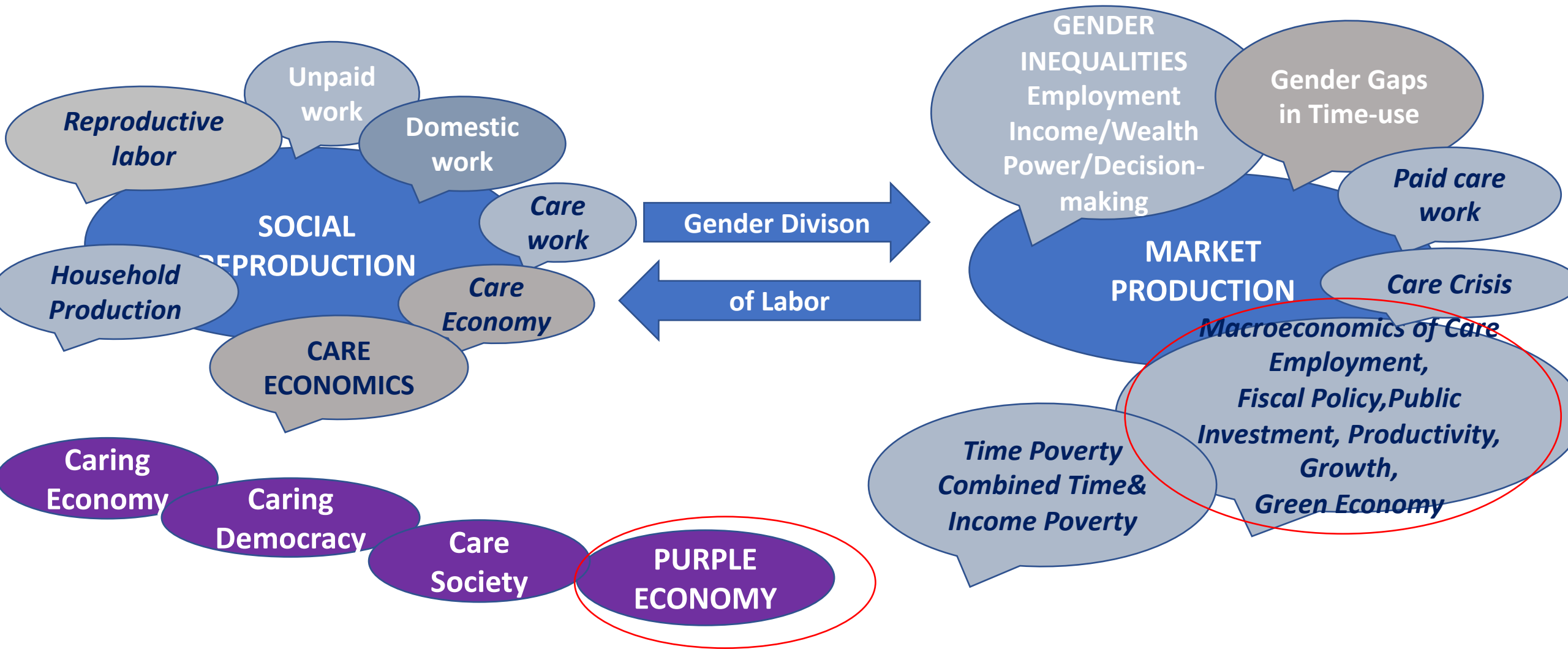
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Lecture Outline

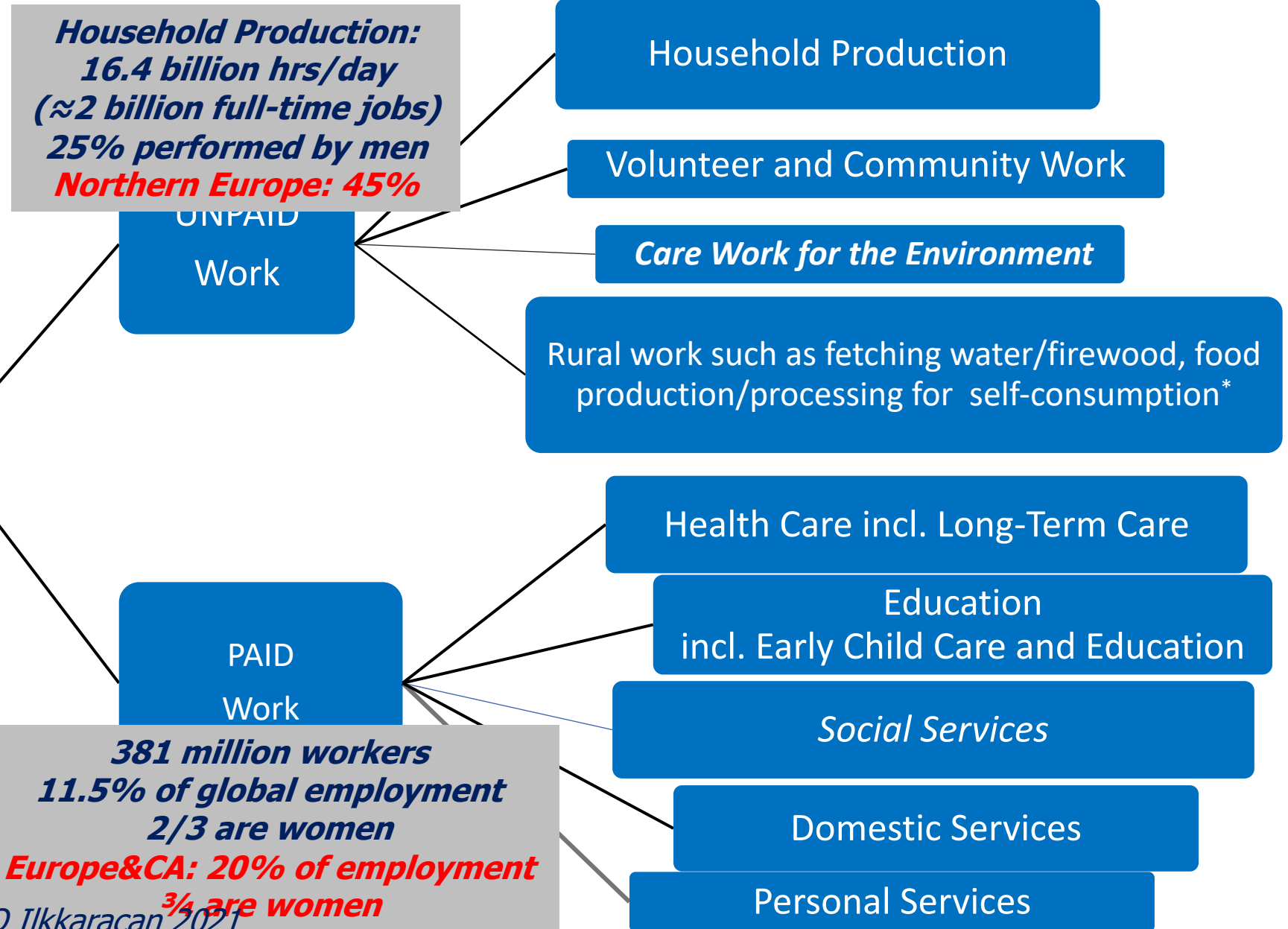
- I. Gender, care and labour: Evolution of conceptual thinking
- II. What is the 'care economy'? An Overview
- III. Purple Economy: Definition, Guiding Principles and Policy Pillars
- IV. Macroeconomics of Investing in the Purple Economy
- V. Purple and Green Economy Synergies for the Future of Work and Economies

Gender, Care and Labour: Evolution of Conceptual Thinking



The Care Economy- An overview

Production of goods and services necessary for physical, social, emotional wellbeing of children, elderly, ill, disabled as well as of healthy, prime-working age adults, including self-care; so as to allow them to function at a socially acceptable level of capability, comfort and safety.*



*Himmelweit 2007; source: UNW-ILO Ilkharacan 2021

Extended Definitions of Care Economy, Caring Labor → Social Reproduction

- Beyond individuals/households care to also entail CARE for
 - Community Wellbeing
 - Nature and Ecological Wellbeing
 - Wellbeing of all living species

Joan Tronto (2013), Caring Democracy: Markets, Equality and Justice

Care as “everything we do to maintain, continue and repair our world so that we can live in it as well as possible.

*That world includes (not only) our bodies, ourselves (but also) our environment,
all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.”*

Crisis of Care, Crisis of Social Reproduction

- *Decreasing willingness and ability of people to care, erosion of caring norms(Himmelweit 2007)*
- *Growing imbalances within and across societies in access to care (Floro 2012)*
- *through overwhelming prioritization of the use of resources towards meeting the requirements of market production over those of social reproduction*
- *Emerging care gaps in long-term care in aging societies; the unmet care needs in the face of health shocks and the increasing pressures on care under the climate change as indicators of a care crisis (UNDP - HDR 2015)*

+ Global pandemic(s), migration, human and natural disasters

Investing in Care → not only for equality but also for building resilience against shocks

PURPLE ECONOMY

- Appeals to the widely used concept of '*the Green Economy*'
- Uses *Purple* → symbolic color of women's movements in some countries

a catchphrase capturing the vision of a *gender equal* and *caring* economic order

- *European Women's Lobby: Purple Pact – A Feminist Approach to the Economy*
- *International Women's Rights Action Watch IWRAW-AP (Malaysia); Women for Women's Human Rights (Turkiye)*

GUIDING PRINCIPLES (*Ilkkaracan 2023*):

1. Warns against the trade-off's between the objectives of gender equality and caring.
2. Rests on simultaneous perspectives of care givers and care receivers.
3. Emphasizes the complementarities of a Purple Economy with other economic and social objectives beyond gender equality and caring: ALSO WITH SUSTAINABLE, INCLUSIVE AND RESILIENT ECONOMIC ORDER.

PURPLE ECONOMY – 3 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. Warns against the trade-offs between the objectives of 'gender equality' and 'caring'.

- A Caring Economy → ???? → A Gender Equal Economy
 - *part-time, flexible work for women; pensions for women in full-time homemaking; universal basic income*
- A Gender Equal Economy → ???? → A Caring Economy
 - *Employer subsidies for women's employment, support to women's career advancement, entrepreneurship, etc.*
 - McKinsey Global Institute Reports: *Trillions of dollars* can be added to global GDP if women were to access the same employment patterns (rates, hours and wages) as men
 - *What happens to billions of hours of unpaid care work?*

PURPLE ECONOMY – GUIDING PRINCIPLES

2. Rests on 2 guiding principles of simultaneous perspectives of caregivers and care receivers:

- Equality in care giving through co-responsibility
 - of private households and the state, and of women and men
- Equality in care receiving through universal access to quality care
 - by children and youth, ill, older persons, people with disabilities, vulnerable groups (including self-care)

Four Pillars of a Purple Economy

Universal Social Care Infrastructure



Accesible and Quality

Healthcare

Education

Care Services

for children, youth, elderly, disabled and ill;

PURPLE JOBS

Labor Market Regulation for work-life balance

with equal gender incentives towards

Dual earner, dual carer families



Care leave, flexible work, **shorter work weeks**, decent pay and work conditions for care workers, elimination of gender discrimination in labor markets

Time-saving Physical Infrastructure for Rural Communities



Improvements in rural water, energy, transport infrastructure to reduce indirect care work;
green investments in sustainable agriculture and rural production

Enabling Macroeconomic Environment



Decent jobs generation, inclusive, sustainable and resilient economy as the priority objectives of fiscal, monetary and industrial policy;
growth only as one of the tools to achieve these objectives

PURPLE ECONOMY - – GUIDING PRINCIPLES

3. Emphasizes the complementarities of a Purple Economy with other economic and social policy objectives beyond gender equality and caring:

- *Jobs generation → Investing in Purple Economy and Purple Jobs for the future of Work*
- *Poverty alleviation, eliminating intersectional inequalities (not only by gender but also by class, origin, ...)*
- *Human capabilities (capital) and Productivity enhancement*
- *Sustainability → Purple Investments/Jobs are also Green Investments/Jobs*
- *Resilience against shocks: Resilient care systems under pandemics, climate change, shocks.*

ECONOMIC RETURNS TO INVESTING IN THE PURPLE ECONOMY

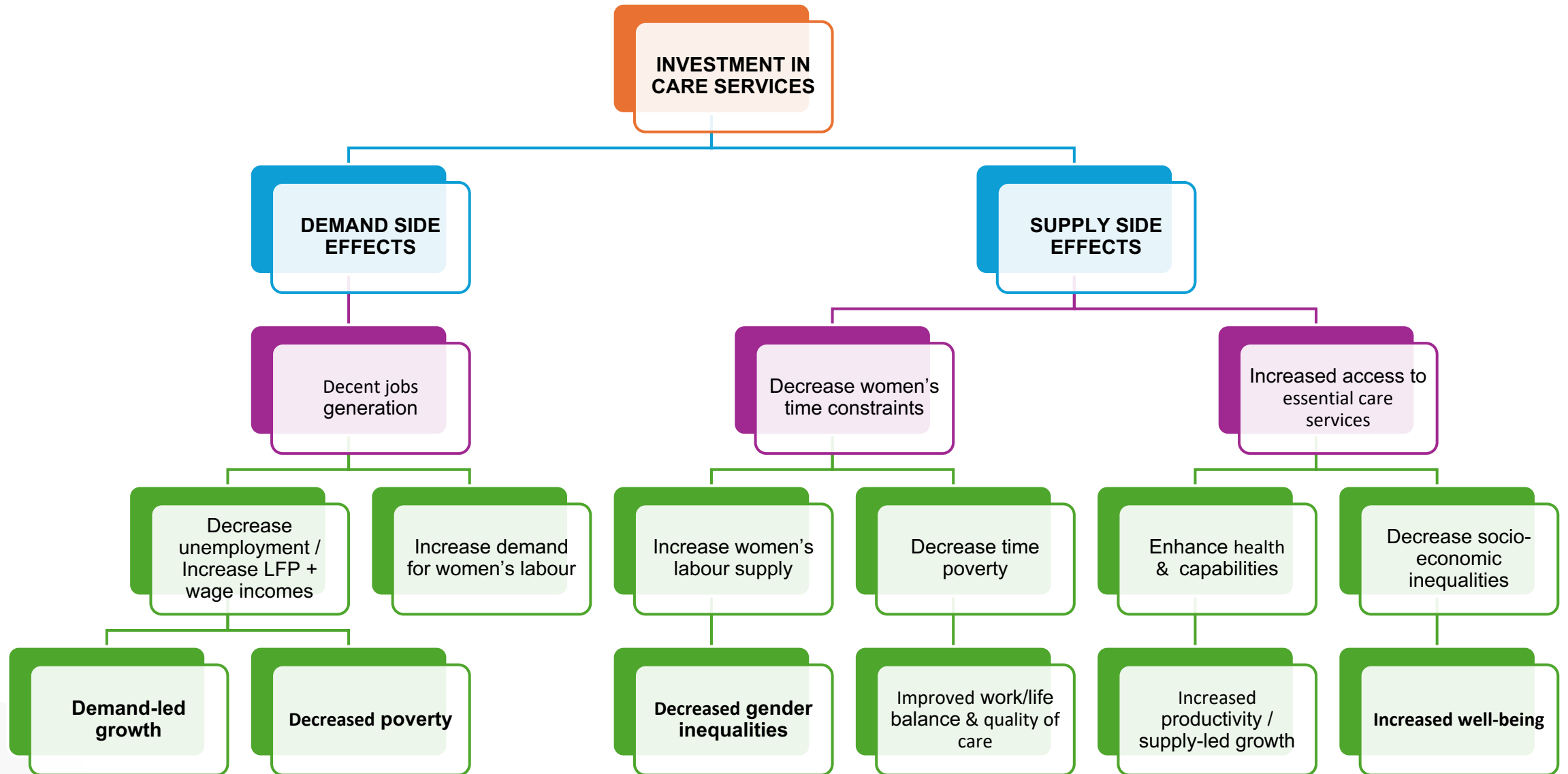
Applied Empirical Policy Simulations on Investing in Care Services Sectors

- Care services sectors have the highest employment multipliers
- Hence the greatest potential for generating a higher number of jobs per Euro invested than spending on other sectors
- + greater potential for decreasing socioeconomic inequalities and alleviating poverty

ILO 2018; Ikkaracan, Kim & Kaya 2015; 2019; Antonopoulos and Kim 2010; 2012; de Henau et.al. 2016, 2017; Zacharias, et.al. 2019

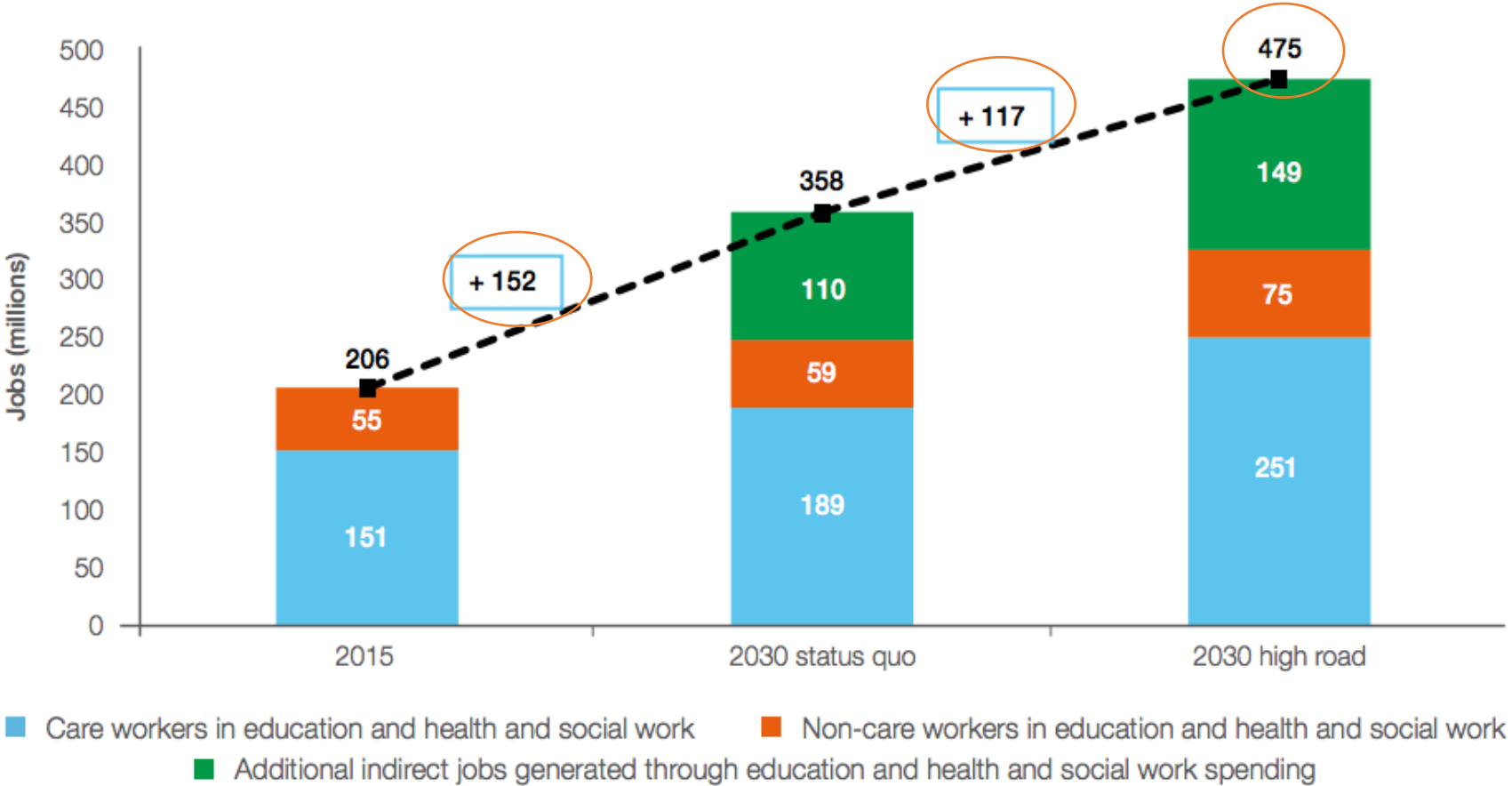
ILO-UNW Policy Tool on Investing in Care (2021; 2026); ILO Care Simulator (2023)

ECONOMIC RETURNS TO INVESTING IN CARE SERVICES EXPANSION



Investing in Social Care in 45 Countries, complying with SDGs by 2030: Future Jobs Creation

Figure 5.11. Total care and related employment – 2015 vs. 2030 status quo and high road scenarios



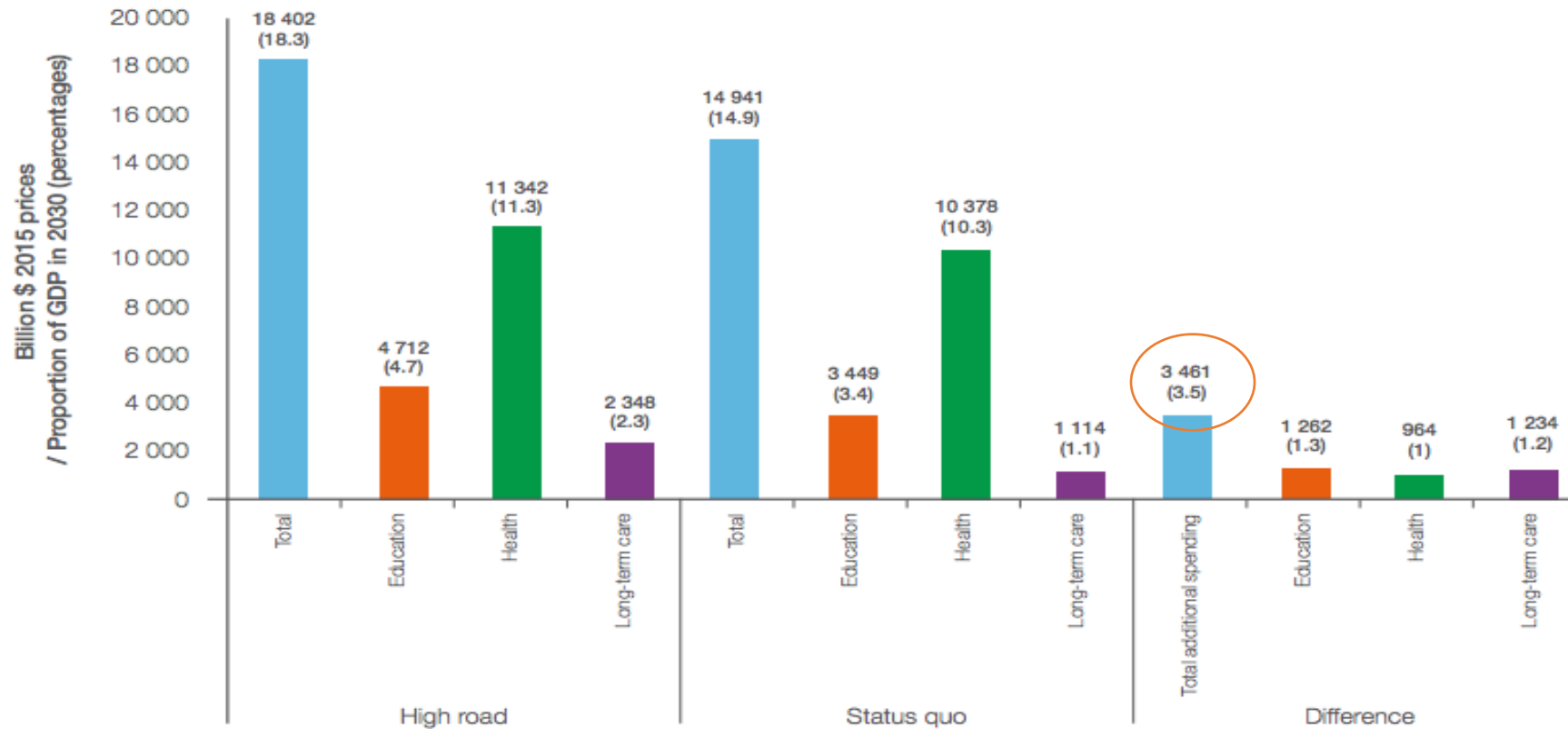
Note: For 2015, ILO calculations based on labour force and household survey microdata.

Source: Ilkkaracan and Kim, forthcoming.

Source: ILO 2018; Ilkkaracan and Kim 2019

Investing in Social Care in 45 Countries, complying with SDGs by 2030: Additional Fiscal Spending Required

Figure 5.12. Total care expenditure, by sector



Source: Ilkkaracan and Kim, forthcoming.

Source: ILO 2018; Ilkkaracan and Kim 2019

<i>Complementarities</i>	<i>Green Economy</i>	<i>Purple Economy</i>
<p>a response to ...</p> <p><i>also to the economic crisis</i></p>	<p>the environmental crisis - sustainability of provisioning by nature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Purple Jobs are also Green Jobs</i> • <i>for gender equality in a green economy you need Purple interventions</i> 	<p>the crisis of care - sustainability of provisioning by caring labor</p> <p><i>Purple Jobs</i></p>
<p>acknowledges that beyond consumption of commodities, human well-being depends on access to</p>	<p>healthy ecosystems</p>	<p>quality care</p>
<p>accounts for</p>	<p>the value of nature</p>	<p>the value of unpaid care work</p>
<p>organized around internalization of ... into the production and consumption patterns</p>	<p>environmental costs</p>	<p>the costs of caring labor</p>
<p>aims at elimination of ... through redistribution of costs</p>	<p>inter-generational inequalities</p>	<p>inequalities by gender, class, origin</p>
<p>calls for a reordering of priorities from consumption</p>	<p>to nature</p>	<p>to nurture</p>
<p>from GDP growth</p> <p><i>Ilkcaracan 2013; 2017</i></p>	<p>to sustainable and equitable growth (or even de-growth)</p>	

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS and AREAS for FUTURE RESEARCH

- ***Thinking on gender, care and labour: shift from exclusive focus on***
 - *care givers' needs (enabling work-life balance) to **Care receivers' needs for universal quality care***
 - *decreasing women's unpaid care work to incentivizing/enabling/mandating **an increase in men's unpaid and paid care work time***

Treat Care as an important Services Sector for achieving multiple economic/social policy targets towards the future of work and sustainable economies

- *Make fiscal space for sufficient public investment with a social infrastructure approach*
- *Sectoral policies*
 - *Professionalization and decent work*
 - *Innovation of new services*
 - *Explore safe spaces for increasing productivity, technological innovation, digitalization in Care Services while cognizant of any trade-offs with quality and inclusions*

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