

Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative (We-Fi)

THEMATIC FUNDING REQUEST

ON A PROPOSED FINANCING

IN THE AMOUNT OF USD10,000,000

TO THE

INTERNATIONAL FINANCE CORPORATION

FOR

CARE2SCALE: PROMOTING WSMEs IN THE CARE ECONOMY

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I. WE-FI THEMATIC REQUEST – DATA SHEET

BASIC INFORMATION

IP Name	International Finance Corporation
Program/Project Name:	Care2Scale: Promoting WSMEs in the Care Economy
Country(s)	Global
# of partners engaged	3 Partners
Private Sector, Public Sector or Both	Private Sector
Implementation Start Date	November 1, 2025 (or IFC We-Fi Funding Disbursement Date)
Commitment End Date	June 30, 2028
Supervision End Date	June 30, 2031
IP Focal Point Contact (name, email, phone)	Hanh Nam Nguyen, nnam@ifc.org , + 12024923057 Zindzi Thompson, zthompson@ifc.org , + 13019108652
Key Staff Contacts (e.g., Project Lead, M&E Officer, Comms Officer)	M&E: Mahjabeen Haji, mhaji@ifc.org Care2Scale: Promoting WSMEs in the Care Economy: Karine Bachongy, kbachongy@ifc.org Alexandre Varela Staff, avarelastaff@ifc.org

WE-FI FUNDING REQUEST

USD	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Total
Investment Activities					
Advisory / Technical Assistance	3,000,000	4,000,000	1,000,000		8,000,000
Grants to WSMEs					
Research & M&E	1,500,000				1,500,000
Administrative Fee	236,842	210,526	52,632		500,000
Total We-Fi Financing Requested	4,736,842	4,210,526	1,052,632		10,000,000

IFC will request funding prior to approving any projects under this Call. Utilization of these funds will take place during project activities. We anticipate that 2-3 Care Business Accelerator projects can commence in 2026 with the additional pipeline projects approved thereafter (in line with the proposed Commitment End Date).

TOTAL PROGRAM COST & CO-FUNDING^{1,2}:

Sources of Financing	Amount (do not round)
We-Fi financing requested (A)	10,000,000
IP Contribution [1] (B)	-
Public-sector co-funding [2] (C)	-
Private sector co-funding [3] (D)	350,000
Additional co-funding ³ (E)	-
Total Non-We-Fi Funding (F)= (B+C+D+E)	350,000
Total Activity Size (G)= (F+A)	10,350,000
Of which % IDA and % FCS (IDA+FCS / G)	20% ⁴
Co-Funding ratio (F/A)	0.034

¹ Co-funding for investments will need to be assessed on a project-by-project basis given that i) WSMEs in the care economy is a narrow sub-segment of WSMEs and will be a new focus area for clients and ii) with limited data available to investment clients on this segment at this stage, the WSME reach and resulting financing to the sub-segment will need to be determined during due diligence.

² See Annex 1 for definitions and guidance on this table

³ *Inter alia*, parallel funding arrangements should be captured here.

⁴ In addition to Nigeria and Iraq highlighted in the proposal, IFC intends to build on employer-supported childcare in several IDA/FCS countries to launch Care Business Accelerator projects to achieve the 20% target.

Care2Scale: Promoting WSMEs in the Care Economy

IFC WE-FI FUNDING PROPOSAL

II. PROGRAM/PROJECT DESCRIPTION

A. Objective Statement

The care economy is essential for enabling women's economic participation, supporting family well-being, and sustaining productivity. Yet, in many emerging markets, care systems are underdeveloped and undervalued, with the burden falling disproportionately on women through unpaid or informal care. This limits women's ability to work or grow their businesses.

For the International Finance Corporation (IFC), investing in the care economy aligns with its mandate to drive inclusive, sustainable growth through private sector development. The sector offers a dual opportunity: tackling a systemic barrier to women's labor force participation and entrepreneurship while fostering a dynamic, job-creating industry. Since 2017, IFC has worked across markets to promote access to quality, affordable care as a strategy for women's economic participation by delivering research, building the business case for employer-supported childcare, and advising companies on policies and practices. This work has helped to boost demand care solutions while also highlighting challenges faced by the care sector. Care service providers, the majority of whom are women, face high operational costs, limited access to training and networks, and restricted access to finance, constraining their growth and the sector's capacity to meet rising demand for affordable, quality care.

The objective of this initiative (Care Program or the Program) is to support the growth of women-owned and women-led small and medium-sized enterprises (WSMEs) in the care sector to meet growing demand for quality, affordable care services. The Program will address the financial and non-financial barriers faced by WSMEs linked to the care sector across emerging markets. By providing targeted capacity building, enhancing market access, and working with and through financial institutions and corporates to increase women's economic participation in domestic markets, the Program seeks to support the growth and sustainability of WSMEs linked to the care economy, and contribute to a more robust and accessible care sector that meets the needs of families, women, employers and economies. IFC's track record in executing investment projects, strengthening private sector practices through advisory work, and convening public and private actors in new

and innovative sectors makes it well-positioned to lead and push the frontier to support care entrepreneurs in the private sector.

B. Program Design and Key Activities

IFC's activities will address the We-Fi objectives of mitigating the various financial and non-financial constraints that care businesses face in emerging markets. It proposes to do so by providing capacity building and market access support to WSME care entrepreneurs, and by working with financial institutions and corporates to promote understanding of the care sector and to unlock financing and market opportunities for WSME care businesses. As studies on the care economy in emerging markets remain nascent and care entrepreneurship is a budding topic for IFC, a preliminary research component will play an important role in informing the program's advisory and investment activities.

The Program builds on the success of IFC's Care Arabia project which is currently running in Jordan with over 50 childcare SMEs, the majority of which are women-led, and has inspired a financial institution in Jordan to develop and pilot a loan product with participating Jordanian nurseries, of which three have submitted loan applications to date (see Exhibit A below for further background on Care Arabia).

The Program activities will be organized across two main components:

- i. **Care Business Accelerators:** IFC will launch a minimum of 7 Care Business Accelerator programs in emerging markets across Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and Middle East, Central Asia, and Türkiye (MCT) to provide capacity building support to WSMEs operating in the care sector. Some countries that are under consideration for an accelerator program are highlighted in Section D. Country/Regional/Global context below and will be confirmed following further consultation with internal and external stakeholders.

Each Care Business Accelerator will support women-owned/led care businesses and cultivate a WSME pipeline for market participants, including financial institutions, corporates and other investors. In some countries, women-owned/led tech-based care start-ups and/or start-ups that have the potential to support WSME care businesses, may also be included.

Key activities under this component will include:

- a. **Capacity Building:** IFC will provide business capacity training to at least 525 women-owned/led SMEs in a minimum of 7 countries. With this goal, IFC will assess the specific financial and non-financial needs of participating WSMEs and design and deliver a capacity building curriculum to support their growth, bankability and opportunity to integrate into value chains. Depending on the assessment's results, the curriculum may include expert-led workshops to build

the commercial, operational, legal and financial capacities of participating WSMEs, and promote international standards on critical topics like child safeguarding and decent work in the care economy. The workshops will be complemented by one-on-one mentorship sessions and peer-learning opportunities. In addition, webinars or other virtual platforms may be leveraged to increase the reach of capacity building for WSMEs. Existing capacity building resources for childcare MSMEs that have been successfully delivered through Care Arabia and other IFC projects will be adapted for use in different markets and new resources will be developed as needed. Furthermore, the program expects that 5 implementing partners (e.g., UN agencies) will provide learning and capacity-building support via Care Business Accelerator workshops and other learning activities. While IFC plans to support a minimum of 525 WSME care businesses through the above activities, this target may be adjusted during implementation and significantly more WSMEs may be reached as other avenues for learning, including virtual workshops, are explored.

- b. **Access to Markets:** IFC will leverage its network and extensive work promoting and building the evidence for family-friendly workplaces to support care WSMEs to establish and strengthen relationships and access new markets. Through matchmaking events and activities, participating WSMEs will have the opportunity to showcase their businesses and connect with potential clients and business partners. For example, participants will have the opportunity to engage with employers that are committed to offering care solutions to employees to better understand their needs and priorities. IFC will also explore opportunities with the World Bank and other partners to reach public sector, academia and other employers that might be interested in private sector care solutions. Innovative care economy start-ups that have the potential to support WSME care businesses to strengthen and expand their offerings and access new markets will also be identified and invited to participate in activities and events. As a result of matchmaking activities, IFC expects that at least 35 of the WSMEs that received training from IFC will report enhanced market linkages.
- c. **Access to Finance:** Financial institution partners will be identified to actively engage with participating WSME care businesses to better understand their potential growth and respond to their financial and non-financial needs. This may include creating a Financial Inclusion Care Economy Task force to champion the development of knowledge on the care economy for financial institutions and/or organizing Care Economy Workshops for financial institutions, investors and experts to share evidence on the business case for investing in the care sector, and exchange experiences engaging with care WSMEs, including challenges and potential solutions. In addition, the program expects to provide advisory services to at least 7 financial institutions to develop or tailor loan or other products to meet the needs of WSME care businesses, with the possibility of blended finance to incentivize and support the financial institutions to pilot their solutions. This

approach—supporting financial institutions in developing loan products for care WSMEs—has already been tested in Jordan under the Care Arabia project, and the lessons learned will be applied to ensure successful replication in new markets. Implementing partners may be identified to provide learning and capacity-building support to help financial institutions better understand opportunities in the care economy. IFC will also explore opportunities to work with ecosystem support organizations, including financial institution partners to provide seed funding to care WSMEs (or care start-ups that support care WSMEs) to pilot new solutions. The Program expects that at least 35 WSMEs will gain access to finance through new or enhanced products and services offered by partner financial institutions. These businesses are also expected to report increased revenues, with total new financing reaching at least USD 350,000.

Key outcomes and lessons learned from the Care Business Accelerators will be captured and promoted to further support the growth of care WSMEs and encourage financial institutions, corporates and other stakeholders to engage with the care economy. This will include the development of a business case study on a loan product for Jordanian nurseries developed by Jordan Kuwait Bank (JKB), which has received three applications to date from nurseries that participated in IFC's Nursery Booster program. See Exhibit A below.

- ii. **Research and Learning:** Research will inform activities to ensure that interventions are data-driven, based on existing evidence, and responsive to the specific challenges and opportunities of the country/operating context. Because care entrepreneurship is a nascent topic among development finance institutions, IFC will capture and promote the experiences and results of interventions to support WSME care businesses.

Details on the research activities can be found in the Impact and Learning Section A: Research and Learning Agenda.

Exhibit A: Care Arabia (2023–2026)

Care Business Accelerator programs are modeled after Care Arabia, a three-year regional World Bank Group initiative led by IFC that aims to improve women’s economic participation in Jordan and Lebanon by providing access to safe and quality childcare services.

IFC research on the care sector in the region found that there is a high unmet demand for childcare services in Jordan (1.45 million children) and Lebanon (470 thousand children). The two countries face similar challenges with limited employer-provided childcare and low compliance with childcare regulations where they do exist, as is the case for Jordan specifically. Existing nurseries lack business and financial skills despite meeting quality standards, have limited capacity to address child protection risks, and struggle with access to finance. This is due to their small scale, lack of collateral, fragile business models and informal financial management practices with weak cashflow control, absent auditing systems, and no structured remuneration.

Responding to these challenges, the program includes a “Nursery Booster” activity to improve the business and financial management skills, safety standards, and bankability of 50 private small and medium-sized nurseries, primarily women-led or owned, through tailored trainings and individual mentorship sessions. Each participant received 32 hours of group training, as well as a minimum of 12 hours of one-on-one business mentorship, tailored to their specific needs, over a two-month period.

The program also supports market linkages with employers through matchmaking events and facilitates access to finance through small grants awarded to selected nurseries through partner bank JKB. Access to finance is further strengthened through the JKB nursery loan, developed during the course of this program - based on market research conducted by IFC - specifically to meet the needs of nurseries in Jordan. Nurseries in this program’s cohort are the first to access this loan, which is made public thereafter.

In 2025/2026, the project will also partner with JKB to support up to 3-5 high potential, tech-based care start-ups to foster innovative solutions with larger scale and connect the startups with potential investors.

C. Institutional and Implementation Arrangements

The International Finance Corporation will be the main implementor of the program, responsible for the overall design, implementation and supervision of activities, and partnerships for the global and country- level activities. The Gender and Economic

Inclusion Department (GEID) will lead business development as well as the implementation of the advisory work. GEID will be composed of staff and consultants based in Washington and in regional offices, to ensure close monitoring of activities on the ground. Advisory teams will work on capacity building activities or any other advisory services provided to partner financial institutions and corporates. Given the global and country-level nature of the program, this team composition will ensure a holistic approach.

The Blended Finance Department will provide compliance, oversight and governance over the use of We-Fi funds. It will manage the We-Fi Trust Fund allocations and ensure funding is channeled to the highest priority activities. It will have a small team dedicated to (i) coordinating across the various implementing departments; (ii) coordinating approvals for We-Fi funding of advisory projects based on IFC's standard advisory processes; (IV) oversight of M&E work to ensure high-quality and consistent data gathering is taking place; and (v) working with the implementing teams to deliver reports and other communications to the We-Fi Secretariat and other stakeholders. IFC's Trust Fund Unit will manage the flow of funds and financial reporting for the We-Fi funding. There will be one We-Fi parent trust fund for advisory services, monitoring, evaluation, and research, governed by IFC's standard operating procedures relating to trust funds.

IFC will commit its advisory funding on a rolling basis to be responsive to private sector clients. Some Program activities are expected to start immediately upon receipt of We-Fi funding under this Call. We-Fi funds will be considered as committed based on approved concept notes for advisory services.

D. Country/Regional/Global context:

Care Business Accelerators will be launched in countries where IFC has existing work on care and evidence of an enabling environment to support the success of an accelerator program, including committed partners and participants. IFC will leverage its expansive network in each country to engage thought leaders and innovators to contribute to activities, including financial institutions, business associations, investors, and UN agencies.

In several of these markets where there is an opportunity to integrate work on the care economy, IFC is working closely with the World Bank to accelerate progress on gender equality. For example, Jordan, Nigeria, Mexico and Vietnam have been selected for fast-track implementation of the World Bank's 2024-2030 Gender Strategy through deepened collaboration and coordination between World Bank and IFC. Alternative countries may be considered as IFC's work on gender equality and childcare advances across regions and presents new opportunities to focus on women's entrepreneurship on the care economy.

While the Program is global in nature, the countries below are some examples of those under consideration for the Care Business Accelerators⁵:

Mexico: Unpaid domestic and care work is a key barrier to women’s economic participation in Mexico where the female labor force participation rate of 47% remains below the OECD average of 67% and Latin American average of 52%. With only 0.91 childcare centers per 1,000 children under six-years-old – as well as wide disparities in quality of care, boosting women’s economic opportunities in Mexico requires an increase in quality, affordable childcare services ([World Bank, 2020](#)). Mexico has about 5,100 private childcare centers—85% of them microenterprises employing up to 10 workers ([INEGI, 2024](#)). However, little is known about their business models, needs, constraints, or scalability. IFC Program activities in Mexico can complement work being undertaken by IBRD to support the design and implementation of Early Childhood Care and Education subnational policies, as well as research on the supply of public childcare services in Mexico.

Vietnam: In Vietnam, where industrial zones are expanding and female labor force participation remains high, access to affordable, quality childcare is a growing concern. Despite strong demand, care services are fragmented and underdeveloped, particularly for lower-skilled workers. IFC’s report, “Tackling Childcare: The Business Case for Employer-Supported Childcare in Vietnam” ([IFC, 2020](#)) was the first to quantify the business benefits of family friendly workplaces for Vietnamese employers, catalyzing further engagement and policy dialogue with the World Bank, the Ministry of Education and Training, and other development partners, to create the enabling environment for private sector participation and scalable models in underserved areas. The Program can build on existing activity in the country, where IFC is conducting a market assessment to identify opportunities and investment-related constraints of early childhood care service provision in selected industrial zones and urban areas, with an aim to identify entry points for private sector investment in the sector.

Indonesia: In Indonesia, where female labor force participation has remained essentially unchanged since 2000 (~53% vs 82% male) despite improvements in education, access to care services is emerging as a critical enabler of women’s employment and economic empowerment, especially in urban and industrial settings. In July 2025, IFC published a report, “From Barriers to Breakthroughs: Family-Friendly Workplaces for Indonesia’s Future” ([IFC, 2025](#)), which surveyed over 2,000 employees from 13 private sector Indonesian companies, highlighting the business cost of unmet care demands, complementing work that is underway by the World Bank and the Government of Indonesia. The Program can leverage existing efforts where IFC is undertaking a market

⁵ In addition to Nigeria and Iraq highlighted in the proposal, IFC has existing programs on employer-supported childcare in a number of IDA/FCS countries including Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Kenya, Tanzania, Lebanon and Pakistan. IFC intends to explore opportunities to build on these programs to launch Care Business Accelerator projects in additional IDA/FCS countries.

assessment and launching a peer learning partnership, to support companies implement family friendly workplace policies.

Iraq (Conflict): Iraq has the world’s second-lowest female labor force participation rate (16% in 2025), with childcare access a major barrier. IFC research shows unmet demand for services for 5.3 million children, requiring ~76,000 nurseries. Even closing 1% of this gap (762 nurseries) would need USD 76 million in capital investment, highlighting a clear opportunity for financial institutions. Yet Iraq currently has only ~750 nurseries, meeting just 1.25% of demand. Providers face weak business skills, fragile financial models, and limited access to finance. IFC sees strong potential to replicate its Care Arabia “Nursery Booster” in Iraq to strengthen provider capacity, child safeguarding, and access to finance through tailored financial products. IFC can leverage its partnership with the World Bank which has an extensive nursery database to ensure outreach and targeting. IFC is also exploring partnership opportunities—similar to its collaboration with JKB in Jordan—with the National Bank of Iraq (NBI), a pipeline investment client for IFC’s FIG department. NBI has expressed strong interest in collaborating with IFC on a tailored loan product that meets the specific needs of Iraqi nurseries. IFC can also support early-stage tech-based care startups (women-owned/led or that support WSMEs) to design, test, and validate solutions.

Jordan: In Jordan, only 14% of women participate in the labor force, with childcare cited as a major barrier. The country has just 450 private nurseries—mostly small, under 10 employees—leaving a 78% gap between supply and demand for childcare for 1.5 million children. To help close this gap, the World Bank is supporting the Government of Jordan by financing the establishment of over 100 new nurseries through a grant scheme. Yet grants alone are not enough, their sustainability depends on boosting enrolment, managing resources effectively, and maintaining quality. Building on its past experience implementing the Care Arabia project and leveraging its partnership with the World Bank, IFC can expand its support to care businesses, including by providing capacity building, access to markets and access to finance in partnership with JKB and/or other financial institutions, to those benefiting from the World Bank grant scheme mentioned above. IFC can further expand its impact by supporting early-stage tech-based entrepreneurs (women-led and/or those supporting WSMEs) to design, test, and validate solutions.

Nigeria (IDA/Conflict): An IFC study, “Investing in Childcare: A Game Changer for Businesses and the Nigerian Economy” ([IFC, 2023](#)), found that while demand for quality, affordable childcare services is increasing rapidly, especially in urban centers, 76% of care entrepreneurs, majority of whom are women, lack access to formal financing. Private capital needs range from USD 14,000 to USD 240,000 per provider, with 61% relying solely on personal savings and just 18% accessing formal bank credit. IFC aims to work with employers, financial institutions, and others to support the growth of WSME care providers and accelerate the availability of quality, affordable, childcare services. IFC recently convened technical consultations with financial institutions and care entrepreneurs, identifying key constraints and opportunities to unlock capital for care in

Nigeria. Financial actors expressed growing interest but cited high perceived risk and low familiarity with care business models. IFC can leverage these insights and existing relationships with partners such as UN Women, Nigerian Exchange Group, and Lagos Chamber of Commerce and Industry to inform forward looking activities aimed at supporting WSME care businesses.

E. Strategic Partnerships:

World Bank: IFC works closely with the World Bank on the care topic to ensure that IFC's private sector focused advisory and investment activities, including those supported by We-Fi, complement public sector investments and are part of broader strategies to create robust care economies. At a global level, IFC collaborates with the World Bank's Invest in Childcare initiative to generate and promote knowledge to drive investments in quality, affordable childcare. At the regional level, IFC jointly implements projects such as Care Arabia with the World Bank under the Mashreq Gender Facility, a joint IFC-WB technical facility launched in 2019 and aimed at closing gender gaps in Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq. IFC and World Bank are also deepening collaboration on care to fast-track implementation of the World Bank's 2024-2030 Gender Strategy through collaborative country programming in countries such as Jordan, Nigeria, Mexico, Indonesia and Vietnam.

UN Agencies: IFC is exploring partnership with UN Women in Asia and Africa to support implementation of Care Business Accelerator activities. UN Women has experience supporting care WSMEs and start-ups in the Asia-Pacific region through its regional Care Action Labs and is planning to expand its programming on care entrepreneurship to additional regions. IFC is also exploring partnership with ILO to promote decent work in the care sector, including by ensuring equal pay and prevention of violence and harassment, through Care Business Accelerator programming.

Business Associations: IFC is exploring opportunities to expand outreach to WSME care enterprises, financial institutions and other key stakeholders through partnership with business associations and other private sector-focused initiatives. For example, in Nigeria, IFC is engaging the Lagos Chamber of Commerce and the Nigerian Exchange Group, in Vietnam, the Association of Non-Public Pre-schools.

Strategic partners and partnership terms will be determined at the country level recognizing that needs, priorities, capacity and capabilities of both IFC and potential partner organizations vary across regions.

F. Blended Finance & Results Based Mechanisms (RBMs)

Blended Concessional Finance ("blended finance") is a powerful tool to create impact in critical development areas. Blended finance helps rebalance the risk-return profile of high-impact projects that are not yet viable on commercial terms but can lead to

commercial sustainability of the sector over time; or although commercially feasible, require some sort of financial incentives to overcome biases to materialize. When deployed judiciously, blended finance can nudge forward a pipeline of first-mover, private sector projects that is able to demonstrate the commercial possibilities to the market⁶. With a strategic and disciplined approach to blended concessional finance, IFC ensures that it is not distorting markets through the use of concessional resources, in line with IFC's governance standards and the [DFI Enhanced Blended Concessional Finance Principles for Private Sector Projects](#).

IFC's experience in using blended finance over the past 15+ years shows the value of well-targeted instruments to enable and/or incentivize clients to push into new or challenging markets. Non-returnable capital instruments, such as performance-based incentives and interest rate buy-downs, help deliver greater transformational impact and higher leverage for contributor funds or address behavioral constraints while other blended finance instruments, such as first loss guarantees and debt on concessional terms, help enable projects with skewed risk-reward consideration yet highly developmentally impactful to proceed. In doing so, blended finance helps to facilitate greater development outcomes that otherwise would not happen.

Under the We-Fi 6th Call for Proposals, IFC is not requesting additional blended finance funding. However, in order to support financial institutions with piloting care solutions that are expected to be developed under the Care Business Accelerators, IFC will consider alternative blended finance facilities which can provide more flexibility on the eligibility criteria for women entrepreneurs. WSMEs as defined by We-Fi, when also taking into account the need to have a nexus to the care economy, is a very narrow sub-segment of SMEs. In addition, given that there is limited data available to clients on the extent of their reach to WSMEs in the care economy at this stage, IFC will take a more prudent approach by focusing its We-Fi funding request on advisory solutions.

G. Sustainability, Quality, and Safeguards

The primary purpose of the Care Business Accelerators is to cultivate a pipeline of care WSMEs for IFC clients and promote their understanding of and engagement with the care sector. In doing so, the Care Business Accelerators are anticipated to provide the groundwork and evidence needed for IFC to work with and through financial institutions and corporates to support access to finance and markets for WSME care businesses. By collaborating with select financial institutions to design and pilot loan products or other mechanisms that facilitate financing for care entrepreneurs, IFC aims to generate interest among additional financial institutions and investors—both within the target market and beyond—in exploring and expanding investments in the care economy. IFC also

⁶ Blended finance may not be an appropriate tool if significant regulatory hurdles exist. Often coordinated advisory services and upstream efforts are necessary to first remove barriers to investment and establish improved conditions for private business operations.

anticipates that the focus on market linkages will uncover additional opportunities to support WSME care businesses and growth of the care economy, for example by deepening partnerships with employers committed to family-friendly workplaces or care start-ups that offer digital solutions for care seekers and providers. While the We-Fi funding will be used to support Care Business Accelerators in at least 7 countries, the program model is replicable in other markets and has already been piloted through IFC's Care Arabia project.

IFC's existing work on childcare emphasizes the importance of ensuring that care is of high quality. Given that regulation, quality standards, and quality assurance systems are lacking or ineffective in many emerging markets, IFC developed training on child safeguarding for childcare providers, as well as employers offering employer-supported childcare, to promote and support implementation of internationally recognized good practice. The trainings were developed with support from IFC E&S experts and market-based child safeguarding specialists, and piloted in Jordan, Lebanon and El Salvador under IFC's Care Arabia and Care2Equal projects. These trainings will be customized to address specific country contexts and delivered via the Care Business Accelerators. Supplementary training materials may also be developed with assistance from subject matter experts to address safeguarding risks relevant to additional forms of care, such as eldercare.

Ensuring the well-being of care workers is also critical to strengthening the care economy. Paid care work is typically undertaken by women, often from disadvantaged groups, and is notoriously low paying, insecure and lacking social protection. IFC plans to promote decent work in the care sector through capacity building provided to WSMEs under the Program. Learning materials that will be used will be based on international standards, including ILO's 5R Framework.

These efforts will complement IFC's commitments to environmental and social (E&S) sustainability through its Sustainability Framework, including IFC's Performance Standards on Environmental and Social Sustainability, which establish the standards that IFC investment clients must undertake to meet in activities financed by IFC and define clients' roles and responsibilities with respect to E&S risk management. IFC seeks to ensure, through its due diligence, monitoring, and supervision efforts, that the business activities it finances are implemented in accordance with the requirements of the Performance Standards. Due to the elevated environmental and social risks associated with advisory and investment initiatives in the care sector—which inherently involve vulnerable populations such as children, older adults, and care workers who are predominantly women and often represent other marginalized groups—Care Business Accelerators will be developed in close collaboration with IFC environmental and social specialists, including child protection experts.

III. IMPACT AND LEARNING

A. Theory of Change, Research, Learning and Knowledge Sharing

The proposed IFC program is fully aligned with the [We-Fi Theory of Change](#). The proposal outlines a robust approach to engage multiple partners, including financial institutions and corporates, to enable more WSMEs in the care sector to thrive and grow. Program activities will create a viable pipeline of care WSMEs for corporates, financial institutions and other potential investors, which in turn may benefit from blended finance investments to scale or deepen their business activity with WSMEs. At the financial intermediary level, the financial and non-financial solutions enabled by the Program will increase financing to WSMEs in the care sector, as well as strengthen the business case for investment in care WSMEs. It would also lead to an increase in the availability of products and services that meet the needs of care WSMEs and increase interest and engagement from corporate employers and other partners to build business relationships with WSME care businesses. At the WSME level, the program will improve business practices and management skills among WSMEs and enable them to better access finance and investments, as well as expand relationships with corporates and other partners.

Through this program, IFC aims to support at least **525 WSMEs** to improve their business capacity, and facilitate financing of approximately **USD\$350,000** to at least **35 WSMEs** through linkages with **7 financial institutions**⁷. Additionally, through matchmaking events and networking activities, at least **35 WSMEs** are expected to improve their market linkages with potential clients and partners.

Targets were estimated based on We-Fi's definition of WMSME. In some countries, projects anticipate reaching additional, smaller, women-led businesses. However, only the number of WSMEs as per We-Fi's definition have been factored into the results framework. IFC would welcome a less restrictive definition of WMSME that includes smaller WMSMEs (for example, WMSMEs with a minimum of 2 employees), which can provide some incremental improvement in the results. IFC will continue to be guided by the We-Fi Secretariat on the We-Fi definitions. To the extent that greater flexibility on the definitions is required, IFC would coordinate with the We-Fi Secretariat, accordingly.

B. Research and Learning Agenda

Research will inform activities to ensure that interventions are data-driven, based on existing evidence, and responsive to the specific challenges and opportunities of the country/operating context. Because care entrepreneurship is a nascent topic among

⁷ For advisory services only. Investment reach for care WSMEs will need to be assessed on a project-by-project basis at due diligence

development finance institutions, IFC will capture and promote the experiences and results of interventions to support WSME care businesses.

An evidence-based model for advancing women's economic participation has already proven successful through the Sourcing2Equal initiative, funded by We-Fi. For example, in Kenya, the first-ever market study, which revealed that just 3 percent of corporate procurement spend went to women-owned businesses and identified the barriers faced by both buyers and suppliers, helped build the business case for Inclusive Supply Chain Finance (SCF) solution, became a national reference point and directly informed targeted interventions. In Colombia, similar research guided the design of local strategies. Building on this model, our proposed program will apply the same approach to the care economy (a nascent, data-scarce sector) by conducting rigorous research with WSMEs as well as care service users. This will fill a critical knowledge gap, ensure that interventions respond to actual market needs, and position the program as a leading reference for advancing WSMEs in the care sector.

A similar approach was adopted by the Care Arabia project. An IFC study, "Formal Childcare in Jordan: Limited Services and Unmet Demand" ([IFC, 2024](#)) confirmed high unmet demand for nurseries in Jordan and identified specific barriers faced by WSMEs. An investment thesis outlining the potential returns in the market, including the capex and opex requirements for establishing a typical childcare center and the expected break-even period was also developed. These insights directly informed the design of the JKB loan product—shaping loan size, repayment terms, and other features to align with the financial realities of care providers.

The scope and depth of research in each country will depend on availability of existing data and information. Research and learning materials anticipated to be developed include:

- i. **Market Assessments & Scoping:** In markets where existing research is limited, IFC anticipates undertaking a comprehensive market assessment. 2-3 country market assessments are expected to be developed in order to assess the financing gap to care WSMEs that can inform the design and delivery of care business accelerator programs and investment opportunities. Given that IFC's research to date has focused on childcare, research and market mappings to expand understanding of other dimensions of care may also be pursued. IFC will also conduct a global mapping of care platforms, their characteristics, business models, and share of women-owned care platforms. It will analyze the investment landscape, and present capital requirements and constraints faced by these platforms. Additionally, it will quantify the care entrepreneurs on these platforms, their needs and challenges to uncover investment bottlenecks and inform action to support the growth of both care entrepreneurs leveraging digital platforms as well as women-owned care platforms. This work will support the inclusion of care start-ups in select Care Business

Accelerators and inform analysis of the potential for broader IFC advisory and investment activities to support the growth of digital platforms, including WSMEs.

- ii. **Data Collection and Analysis:** In markets where IFC, World Bank and others have already undertaken or are undertaking relevant market assessments, IFC expects to conduct light touch data collection and analysis to address research gaps. Lighter touch data collection and analysis is anticipated to be needed in 4-5 countries.
- iii. **Lessons Learned:** IFC will develop a case study on the loan product developed by JKB in connection with IFC's Care Arabia project to capture loan performance, identify lessons learned and inform collaboration with financial institutions in other markets. The case study will be shared globally to inform the development of Care Business Accelerators in other markets.

IFC will give priority to developing knowledge products that document outcomes and lessons learned from the Care Business Accelerators, including evidence supporting investment in WSME care businesses. Beyond producing written business case studies, IFC intends to pursue the creation of videos and other multimedia materials designed to engage a broader audience via social media platforms, events, and additional channels. IFC will use these knowledge products to support ongoing cross-country exchange and enhance the Care Business Accelerator model.

C. Results Framework

IFC's approach to monitoring, evaluation and learning is designed to systematically track progress, measure effectiveness, and capture lessons learned throughout the project lifecycle. This framework aligns with the requested annual reporting on activities and results and semi-annual reporting on sources and uses of funds.

In order to capture impact, IFC will employ a mixed-methods approach, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive picture of the program's success and impact. For each sub-project under the facility, IFC adopts an end-to-end framework for its results measurement and monitoring to ensure a feedback loop in driving project design ex-ante and promoting learning and accountability ex-post. At project approval, IFC M&E staff together with the respective project teams will set up a results framework with specific output, outcome and impact indicators, baselines and targets for each individual sub-project and will then track the results throughout the project lifecycle. IFC reviews the progress of each project against its development objectives and targets semi-annually as part of the project supervision review process. At project completion, IFC assesses the development effectiveness of the project following corporate guidelines.

IFC utilizes a range of different methods of data collection to capture development impact. This includes standardized surveys of clients in the financial and real sectors that

are administered on an annual basis, where data is checked and audited to ensure accuracy. In addition, IFC uses feedback forms from training participants and providers, as well as focus group discussions. For example, Sourcing2Equal Kenya measured immediate knowledge gains for WSMEs through post-training session questionnaires. At the end of the project, an independent data collection firm surveyed a representative sample to assess outcomes. The survey identified the proportion of WSMEs that had secured new contracts, those that increased revenues, those that expanded their workforce as a result of winning contracts, and those that accessed finance to enhance contract delivery. It also gathered insights on persistent challenges and unmet needs. This combination of ongoing monitoring and endline outcome measurement provided credible, actionable evidence of impact, while highlighting areas for further support.

Under Care Arabia, beyond the standard post-training satisfaction surveys, IFC will track nurseries' progress on their action plans through six-month check-ins. An impact survey will assess adoption of coaches' recommendations, business benefits realized, and attribution of performance improvements to IFC's support. In parallel, IFC will monitor uptake and utilization of the JKB nursery loan product to evaluate the effectiveness of the project's access-to-finance component.

Background on the key indicators that will be reported by the Program is included along with the We-Fi Results Framework under Attachment 2 below.

IV. KEY RISKS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

The proposed program entails several potential institutional, political, fiduciary and other risks, which are outlined below. These risks are deemed to be moderate in most cases. IFC has a well-developed and tested approach to incorporating risk management into its programs and advisory services, including attention to vulnerable populations and the environment. IFC has several mechanisms to identify risks and flag issues, including IFC Risk Assessment systems – Investment Reporting Platform (IRP), Environmental Social Risk Rating (ESRR), Integrity Due Diligence (IDD), and the AIMM system.

All projects are required to develop risk identification and mitigation strategies as part of project preparation and implementation, as described below (supplemented by Annex 3: We-Fi Risk Framework):

- i. **Activity Design and Implementation Arrangements.** IFC has a long history of implementing SME and WVSME finance projects and collecting and sharing lessons learned. Similarly, IFC's pioneering work on childcare has helped transform workplaces across regions and industries to support families and enable more and better jobs for women. Since 2017, IFC has developed over 20 reports and more than 35 case studies highlighting the business case for family-friendly workplaces and boosting demand for childcare solutions. Through client advisory

projects and peer-learning initiatives, IFC has developed robust partner networks and gained comprehensive insights into the challenges and opportunities for enhancing care solutions across various regions. Recent initiatives aimed at meeting growing demand for quality, affordable care services by supporting the growth of care businesses—such as Care Arabia—have enhanced IFC’s expertise in the care economy and understanding of pathways to facilitate its expansion. The activities in this funding request are informed by these lessons from previous IFC programs and complement existing operations in portfolio. The activities have been conceived based on consultation with potential partners, and are demand driven. The funding request also allows IFC to test innovative models or bring existing models and approaches to new markets with higher risk, where there is always a risk that the intended outcomes and impacts do not materialize. To mitigate for this, the initiative will devote significant resources to leveraging existing experience to be adapted for more fragile markets, to increase the likelihood that adaptation can happen quickly.

- ii. **Political, Social and Governance Risks.** Some of the projects might be in countries that face various legal gender discrimination issues as well as challenging political situations. IFC staff will monitor local developments closely to ensure timely actions are taken in the event of unexpected changes in the macro, structural and/or regulatory environment.
- iii. **Fiduciary Risks.** In most countries, fiduciary risks are considered low as IFC has robust systems that ensure We-Fi funds are managed and used responsibly. First, every client or partner that IFC engages with has to undergo an Integrity Due Diligence (IDD) review which looks at various areas including politically exposed persons, money laundering, financial mismanagement and any other negative news associated with C-suite and senior management in the company as well as people in direct relationship to the project. IFC partners only with companies and partners that pass the integrity due diligence test. In addition, IFC signs legal agreements with advisory clients, which clearly spell out the terms and conditions of engagement. This is done only after IFC is satisfied with the capacity to implement. This ensures that terms of engagement include prudential management of funds. In cases where funds are disbursed to an implementing partner, robust grant agreement processes or procurement processes are put in place to ensure that the funds are well managed. Grants and project implementation funds are generally disbursed in tranches that are dependent on the achievement of milestones. Third party implementers, in the case of advisory projects must undergo a process to be approved as World Bank Group vendors. In a few instances, financial institutions, UN agencies, and other stakeholders might lack experience in the implementation of IFC-financed operations and capacity overall which might present some challenges in complying with fiduciary requirements. The risk mitigation measures include training to strengthen the capacity of partners involved in the delivery of the activities.

- iv. **Environment and Social Safeguards/Standards.** Implementation of the proposed program will be with full compliance with the IFC's Environment and Social Safeguard Policy (ESRR). As part of its Due Diligence, and as mandated by IFC's Sustainability Policy, IFC team will screen the project to assess consistency with IFC's Performance Standards. Environment and social risks will be further reviewed throughout the life-cycle of the project. IFC's advice will be provided in a manner consistent with the principles of the relevant Performance Standards, and the IFC team will assist clients and partners in gaining a good understanding of IFC's Performance Standards, and provide recommendations for appropriate mitigation measures and compliance whenever warranted. Furthermore, IFC will seek to mitigate the elevated risks associated with the program's emphasis on care, including by incorporating training modules on child safeguarding and promoting decent work within the care economy into its capacity building initiatives.

V. COST AND FINANCING PLAN

The budget categories in the table below aligns with the activities under *Part I.PROGRAM/PROJECT DESCRIPTION, Section A Program Design and Key Activities* and will be allocated as described.

Budget Categories	Amount (do not round)					# of WSMEs Reached	Countries*
	Investment Activities	Advisory/ Technical Assistance Activities	Grants to WSMEs	Total We-Fi Funding Requested	Expected Co-Financing		
Care Business Accelerators		7,800,000		7,800,000	350,000	525	7
Program Management		200,000		200,000			
Support activities, Research, M&E		1,500,000		1,500,000			
Administrative Fee**				500,000			
Total				10,000,000	350,000		
* if funding is allocated to more than one country per component please fill out the "Country Allocation Table" below. ** for admin fees, input the amount under the total column.							

* The IFC We-Fi program is global in nature and open to all countries and territories eligible under We-Fi. As such, the specific countries and We-Fi amounts to be deployed under this Call will be determined on a project-by-project basis during implementation.

VI. ATTACHMENTS

[Attachment 1: Care Theme](#) [Not applicable: We-Fi Secretariat Guidance]

[Attachment 2: We-Fi Results Framework](#)

The Program will leverage IFC's experience in collecting and reporting results to capture the overall Program performance, taking the following into consideration:

i. Key Indicators

IFC plans to meet and exceed reporting requirements on key indicators, including through reporting on key metrics as well as providing context and color around the program its beneficiaries during the data collection process. On key indicators, IFC will report on mandatory indicators, including indicator 1 (funds mobilized), indicator 12 (number of WSMEs reached), indicator 15A (number of jobs), indicator 16 (increase in care service beneficiaries), and an additional impact indicator, indicator 13 (number of WSMEs reporting an increase in annual revenues).

In addition, IFC will report on five additional core indicators, including indicator 2 (financing provided to WSMEs through FIs), indicator 3 (number of WSMEs that access new financing), indicator 4 (number of WSMEs accessing entrepreneurial support activities), indicator 7 (number of WSMEs with enhanced market linkages), and indicator 11 (total number of partner institutions supported by We-Fi).

Please note that as this is a global program, the results measurement framework has aggregated targets. Country focus and partners will be further developed and defined during the implementation phase of the program.

ii. Capturing impact and ambition through indicators

The targets for all indicators have been defined based on IFC's experience from the Care Arabia project in Jordan and the results achieved to date, as well as preliminary consultations with FIs and other stakeholders in countries where IFC is considering launching Care Business Accelerators.

Based on this, IFC estimates that We-Fi funding will enable IFC to provide tailored capacity building to at least 525 WSMEs in the care sector (**Indicator 4**). Additionally, the project will facilitate access to markets through matchmaking events and networking activities to connect care WSMEs with potential clients and partners, including corporate employers and care start-ups that have the potential to help care WSMEs expand their service offerings and grow their businesses. As a result, at least 35 WSMEs are expected to report enhanced market linkages, such as securing new contracts, entering new market segments, or forming strategic partnerships (**Indicator 7**).

Based on previous experience delivering care programing in countries across the globe, IFC anticipates engaging at least 7 partner organizations, including UN agencies and business associations, to support capacity building and market linkage activities (**Indicator 11**).

The project will also support access to finance for at least 35 WSMEs (**Indicator 3**), all of which are also expected to report an increase in revenues as a result of an increase in their access to finance (**Indicator 13**). It will do so by partnering with and providing advisory services to at least 7 financial institutions to design or adapt financial products for care WSMEs (**Indicator 11**). Based on the terms and uptake of the loan product developed by Jordan Kuwait Bank in connection with the Care Arabia project and initial consultations with financial institutions that are interested in the care economy in markets such as Iraq and Nigeria, IFC aims to unlock USD 350,000 in financing for WSMEs working with and through financial institutions (**Indicator 2**).

By the end of the project, the Care Business Accelerators are expected to directly support a total of 525 women-owned/led SMEs in the care economy (**Indicator 12**) and mobilize USD 350,000 in financing for care WSMEs (**Indicator 1**). As care WSMEs supported by the program expand, they are projected to create 70 additional direct jobs, contributing to increased employment opportunities—particularly for women—in their communities (**Indicator 15A**). Strengthened and more sustainable care enterprises will also be able to reach and serve an estimated 700 additional care service beneficiaries, thereby improving access to quality care services and enhancing the well-being of families (**Indicator 16**). Collectively, these outcomes will contribute to women’s economic empowerment, the growth of the care economy, and broader social and economic development in participating countries.

As this is a new and innovative endeavor with little precedent, different factors such as market size, differing definitions of ‘care’, enabling environments, and sector maturity may result in varying outcomes across countries. As such, targets may be adjusted over the course of implementation to reflect evolving realities and ensure they remain realistic and evidence-based while maintaining the ambition of this program.

Attachment 3: Risk Framework



IFC We-Fi Risk
Framework (Care Call