



**68th Commission on the Status of women
Side-event**

**Building a Future Where Care is Valued and Shared:
Leveraging CEDAW to Advance the Care Economy**

Thank you, Alia, for your kind introduction. And to UN Women for hosting this event.

It's an honour to participate in this important conversation today with prominent panelists; not just to bring the civil society perspective, but also to offer, on behalf of Make Mothers Matter, proposals for how we go about building a future where care is valued and shared.

Unpaid care work is work, indispensable work that sustains families, communities, society and the economy – and that benefits us all. It must be a collective responsibility - a point which is implied in CEDAW's preamble, when it calls for a "sharing of responsibility between men and women and society as a whole".

Redistribution between men and women is absolutely key – and supported by different articles of CEDAW. But more guidance is needed on redistributing responsibilities and costs across society.

Today, we call for a multistakeholder approach: in addition to governments, communities and private companies have a key role to play in recognizing, redistributing and supporting unpaid care work.

Looking at the community level...

MMM federates a network of grassroots organisations active at the community level in about 30 countries across the world. They work with and for mothers, who are the majority of unpaid care providers.

When analysing the work they do, we see that they mostly target mothers in very particular contexts and situations of vulnerability - something which is difficult for governments to do. They are also close to their beneficiaries, understand their needs, and are more agile and able to adapt to evolving situations. Something which is difficult for governments to do.

For example: our member in Morocco supports and empowers young mothers who become pregnant outside marriage and are cast out by their families and society. Our member in Spain supports poor single mothers through professional training, legal counselling, peer network support, financial literacy education. Our members in Canada and Italy support migrant mothers and their integration in their new country. Our member in Kenya offers professional training and childcare to single mothers living in a slum, so that they can escape prostitution.

All these programs can be qualified as success stories; but these organisations struggle financially. What governments – and perhaps even aid agencies - can and should do – and this could be a recommendation of CEDAW - is to recognize the added value and impact of these small grassroots organizations, by providing financial support, and help scale-up their programs.

Private companies also have an important role to play in supporting unpaid caregivers.

I'd like to quote Danone Italy's Human Resources Director who spoke at our event about changing narratives at the hlpf in 2021:

"We've demonstrated that motherhood and fatherhood don't penalize the company. These [caregiving] experiences equip professionals with stronger skills that can unleash their creativity, organizational abilities and lots of other [soft] skills that can be recognized and measured". She also showed that supporting mothers and other caregivers does bring measurable returns on investment, including improved productivity, talent retention, employees' loyalty and attracting new talents.

Encouraging companies to embrace a similar win-win strategy is also the objective of an initiative that MMM co-founded, and which was launched earlier this month: the Be Family Movement. Its aim is to shift the paradigm, from families adapting to companies to companies adapting to families.

And this brings us to what national governments can do.

Following Covid-19, many have finally realized the importance of addressing this issue of Care. But most are unsure how to do it.

Huge challenges also remain for developing countries, where informal work prevails, and cultural norms and stereotypes are deeply entrenched.

Still, we can see promising initiatives here and there:

- Latin American countries like Argentina, Colombia, Mexico or Uruguay are now committed to building a 'Care Society': because care is also about children, persons with disabilities, older persons rights – and more generally the wellbeing of everyone.
- Australia also embraced a multisectoral approach by establishing a Care and Support Economy Taskforce reporting to the Prime Minister
- In Europe the focus has been first on supporting work-life balance for all caregivers, including men. In 2021, the EU also adopted a Care strategy for both care receivers and caregivers.

So, things are moving in the right direction, although to be really transformative, profound systemic changes to the way our society and our economy work are needed.

I'll end with a call to zoom out and take a cross-sectoral and multistakeholder approach to building transformative care and support systems. The CEDAW committee could take the lead, join forces with other human rights Committees, and involve all stakeholders to develop a joint general recommendation.

Thank you