



**Human Rights Council 58<sup>th</sup> Session**  
**Side-event on 12 March 2025**

**Making Early Childhood Development Real:  
Stories from Grassroots to Government Action**

My short presentation will focus on the vital role of parents for Early Childhood Development – whether they are the biological parents or not.

I have 3 minutes and basically 3 key messages – and then I'll end with a few recommendations.

1. **My first point** is that parents, in particular mothers, are the frontline workers for Early childhood Development, and they must be recognised and supported as such.

Parenting is a rewarding but tough job, which is unpaid, and requires time and energy. Parents must be supported in this long journey – Especially during those critical early years. In particular, new parents are often not really prepared and informed about the importance of these critical early years for their child's future.

2. **My second point** is that ensuring a safe and nurturing family environment for every child must be a shared responsibility.

We know how important nurturing care is during the early years of a child – and how violence and adversity, or even neglect, can negatively affect the physical, intellectual and emotional development of a child – with life-long consequences for their future.

Maternal mental health is absolutely key. Yet, perinatal mental health issues are much more common than was acknowledged until recently – and they impede mothers' ability to take care of their child.

We know that poverty is conducive to domestic violence. We also know that when men / fathers are involved in caregiving, domestic violence decreases.

3. **My 3rd point** is that supporting early childhood development and supporting parents – including mothers during pregnancy – is an investment - a high return investment – certainly not as an expense to be minimized.

So based on these 3 points here are a few recommendations:

- ECD Policy must support families in all their diversity, in particular single-parents' families, and ensure that parents have the required resources, time, information and skills to raise their children. In particular ECD Policy should ensure that no child – no family - lives in poverty.

- ECD Policy begins with Maternity protection, which should be universal – yet, according to ILO only 36% of new mothers actually benefit from such protection. The lack of maternity protection can put a mother in a situation of stress and anxiety, with important consequences on her child.
- ECD Policy should also ensure universal access to quality healthcare for mother and child, including maternal mental healthcare, as well as education, including parenting education (on such topics as nutrition, child development, child psychology, positive discipline, etc.).
- Last but not least, ECD Policy must recognise, value, redistribute and support the unpaid - and at time exhausting - work of caring for a new-born or a very young child. In particular, redistributing this essential work of caring and educating children between men and women not only contributes to gender equality (including by breaking down gender stereotypes), but it is also good for children, and for men themselves. It is really a triple win.

All these policy elements could be part of a specific social protection package supporting child rights – The European Child Guarantee is a good example of what Member States can do.

**I'll end with a quote from Nancy Folbre, a feminist economist:**

“Not all the inputs and outputs come with price tags attached. Somewhere along the way, babies are conceived, nurtured, educated, and launched into adulthood in a process that requires considerable time and effort as well as money.”

Well, I think that this simple fact must be acknowledged. Children do not grow up in a vacuum – parents, mothers in particular – are key actors for child rights, especially during the early years. And they do need more recognition and support.