



Human Rights Council 59th Session
**The Family: Foundation of Society,
Driver of Development and Human Rights**
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Families as Drivers of Gender Equality

Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the Mission of Kyrgyzstan and the co-sponsors for organising this important event and for inviting my organisation, Make Mothers Matter—an international NGO dedicated to advancing women's rights, especially those of mothers.

It is a pleasure to be here today to reflect on the role of families. I was asked to focus specifically on how families can advance gender equality.

Before delving into the topic, it's essential to acknowledge that families can take many forms and may also be environments where human rights violations, abuse, and violence occur—particularly against women and children. However, I firmly believe that ignoring the role of families and the power dynamics within them is not the solution. In fact, promoting gender equality within families is key to addressing such violations.

When we think of gender equality, we often focus on national policies or workplace regulations—and rightly so. But one of the most powerful spaces for transformative change is the home, and this is often overlooked.

Families—regardless of their form—are where we first learn about gender roles, relationships, and responsibilities. They are where gender norms are first internalised, but also where they can first be challenged.

One of the most persistent gender norms is the unequal distribution of unpaid care and domestic work between men and women. This imbalance lies at the root of many gender inequalities and much social and economic injustice.

Globally, women perform 3.2 times more unpaid domestic and care work than men. Even in Europe, where infrastructure is relatively strong and gender equality more advanced, women spend an average of 22 hours per week on unpaid care work, compared to just 9 hours for men. That's nearly a full extra day of unpaid, unrecognised, and undervalued labour. In countries like India or Morocco, women do up to 10 times more.

Since this event is hosted by Kyrgyzstan, I looked into national data: women there do five times more unpaid care work than men. While this indicates room for progress, Kyrgyzstan should be congratulated for being one of the few countries conducting time-use surveys every five years, in line with SDG 5.4. This kind of data collection is essential for tracking and addressing the care gap.

This imbalance doesn't just limit women's time and opportunities—it also reinforces the notion that caregiving is "women's work." But families can be part of the solution, especially if we promote the full participation of men, particularly fathers, in caregiving.

Fathers should not be seen as helpers or backup caregivers. They are equal parents—with both the capacity and the responsibility to nurture children and manage the household.

Yet many fathers still face social, cultural, and structural barriers to full participation. Even when paternity leave is available, men often hesitate to take it due to fears of career setbacks or cultural stigma. In the EU, fewer than one in three fathers take parental leave, and those who do usually take shorter periods than mothers.

But change is possible—and already underway. Research shows that when fathers take parental leave, they tend to remain more engaged in childcare long-term. This involvement strengthens family bonds and reshapes household dynamics.

And it's not just women who benefit. Children gain from having more engaged fathers. Families become more resilient. Men themselves report greater well-being, stronger emotional ties, and less stress when caregiving responsibilities are shared.

Critically, studies also show that when men participate more in caregiving, rates of domestic violence decrease. Promoting gender equality and shared caregiving must be part of any strategy to combat violence against women and children.

So, how can families actively contribute to gender equality?

- By naming, valuing, and recognising care work—in everyday conversations and decision-making.
- By encouraging men and boys to take on caregiving roles as a core part of being a partner and parent—not as optional extras.
- By modelling shared responsibilities for the next generation—so children grow up understanding that care is everyone's job.

Of course, families do not exist in a vacuum. Public policy must support these efforts—with inclusive parental leave, affordable childcare, and flexible work arrangements. The private sector also plays a key role in supporting all caregivers. Civil society, too, can promote change—for example, through parenting programs like Program P by Equipundo, which engages men as caring, equitable, and non-violent fathers.

Sharing care is not about helping women—it's about men doing their fair share. It's about building families where all contributions are visible, valued, and balanced.

Of course, care-sharing is more difficult in single-parent households, which are increasingly common and mostly led by women. These families are particularly vulnerable to poverty. That is why co-responsibility is essential: care is not a private issue, but a collective one. It must be shared across society. Single-parent families need targeted support policies.

To conclude: gender equality begins at home. It begins when men step up as caregivers, when women are supported in pursuing their own aspirations, and when care is treated as a collective responsibility—shared by families, communities, governments, and the private sector.

Thank you. I look forward to our discussion.