



**Make
Mothers
Matter**

Statement prepared for the 107th International Labour Conference
General discussion on the Report of the Director General
The Women at Work Initiative: The push for equality

Make Mothers Matter (or MMM) congratulates the Director General for his excellent report: we welcomes this new “push for gender equality”.

MMM fully agrees that the “time-money-agency conundrum” must be addressed as the main structural obstacle to further progress on gender equality.¹

Central to this conundrum is the issue of unpaid family care work - that is the unequal distribution between men and women of the unpaid domestic and care work, which is essential to reproducing and sustaining families, and which in fact supports the whole economy and society as a whole.²

Globally women still do 2 ½ times more unpaid care and domestic work than men. It is also well established that when paid and unpaid work is combined, on average women work longer hours than men.

Yet, instead of being recognized and valued for combining these care and professional responsibilities, women continue to be penalized. Mothers especially encounter systematic discriminations and obstacles in hiring and promotion, and suffer wage discrimination linked to motherhood (the “motherhood pay gap”)³ – not to mention harassment.

Addressing these issues goes well beyond the labour sector alone and requires a multi-sectorial approach, also involving education, health, social welfare and fiscal sectors.

Allow me to share with you some of MMM recommendations

1. **Promote care as valuable work and consider public spending on policies that support the unpaid care work of nurturing, raising, educating children as an investment in Early Childhood Development and human capital**, and not as a mere expenditure. The potential return on investment is high: in addition to preventing social and health problems linked to burn out and stress, and to countering declining fertility rates in developed countries, this investment could help ensure that every child develops to their full potential, which in turn could break the cycle of poverty, prevent violence and foster more peaceful societies⁴.
2. **Provide accessible, affordable and high-quality public services and infrastructures**, in particular in the most disadvantaged and remote areas, **with the explicit objective of addressing women’s “time poverty”**. Water, electricity, energy, ICTs⁵, transportation, proximity childcare and healthcare are

¹ This analysis also concurs with the result of a survey that MMM conducted in 2011 among 11’000 European mothers. The vast majority of respondent mothers expressed concerns regarding the lack of time, choices and recognition of their role and work as mothers – See <https://makemothersmatter.org/delegations/europe/what-matters-to-mothers-in-europe/>

² Feminists have long identified unpaid care work as a key issue for gender equality. See notably *If Women Counted: A New Feminist Economics* by Marilyn Waring (1988)

³ The motherhood pay gap, a review of the issues, theory and international evidence, ILO Working Paper, March 2015 http://www.ilo.org/global/publications/working-papers/WCMS_348041/lang-en/index.htm

⁴ Early childhood education and care is increasingly recognized as a high return investment - See the Nurturing Care Framework launched at the 71th World Assembly in may 2018: <http://www.nurturing-care.org>

⁵ Internet access is also critical for women’s access to information, education, financial services, and to ensure the viability of self-employment

needed to significantly reduce the time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, and thus free up time for remunerated activities.

3. Promote the **equal sharing of care responsibilities between men and women**, starting with paid paternity leave and shared paid parental leaves. However paternity leave alone will not do the job: it is the whole system that needs to be adapted to the new realities of fatherhood⁶, including how boys are educated.
4. Promote diverse **work and family life reconciliation policies accessible to all**, including the right to request flexible working arrangements⁷, to allow parents and other caregivers to access and stay in paid work. In particular, ensure regulations supporting **quality part-time work and job sharing schemes** that allow both men and women to adjust their workload to their family responsibilities; and reduce discrimination against part-time workers regarding career advancement, pay level, social security, pension rights, etc.
5. Caring and educating a child requires time! Take a **life-course perspective** and **facilitate discontinuous career paths** rather than linear ones, allowing men and women to withdraw from work partially or completely to care for their children or dependent relatives, and then re-enter the labour market without being heavily penalized.⁸
6. Building on the resolution adopted at the 2013 International Conference of Labour Statisticians, **make unpaid family care work visible** to policy makers and society by regularly conducting good quality Time Use Surveys. **Legally recognize unpaid family care work as being a particular category of labour that gives status and rights to caregivers**, including access to social security, education and training; as well as **“care credits”** in the calculation of pension rights⁹.

In conclusion

Addressing the issue unpaid care work to progress on gender equality requires systemic changes and paradigm shifts:

- It is about putting care, education, and the wellbeing of people (and the planet) at the centre of government priorities and policies
- It is also about taking a long-term perspective and investing for the future - moving away from short term GDP growth and shifting to a new economic model¹⁰.

Make Mothers Matter (MMM) is an international NGO created in 1947 to raise the awareness of policy makers and public opinion on the contribution of mothers to social, cultural and economic development. MMM has no political or religious affiliations, and thus transparently voices the concerns of mothers at international level with permanent MMM representatives at the United Nations (General Consultative Status) and at the European Union.

⁶ Men caring for their children from the beginning will be more likely to continue during the whole childhood, which will benefit children, the mothers and the fathers themselves. However, “achieving equality in care and domestic work is not simply an issue of individual men doing more. Employment and livelihood policies (childcare, tax and benefits systems, as well as health, education and social services) have not kept up with the changes taking place in families around the world, and this creates substantial barriers to families who try to operate in a more egalitarian approach”. State of the World’s Fathers report, 2015 - <https://sowf.men-care.org/>

⁷ Like it has been implemented in the UK since 2003 for parents, and extended to all employees since 2014.

⁸ Such a life cycle approach can notably be supported by: (1) Recognizing and validating the competences and skills acquired while doing unpaid family care work; (2) Facilitating access to lifelong education in order to ensure that women and men of all ages can acquire and develop the knowledge, capacities, aptitudes and skills needed to fully adapt and participate in our fast changing world of work.

⁹ These periods are essential to society wellbeing and contribute to the economy and the building of tomorrow’s workforce. They should be recognized as contributory as it is already the case in several States (France, Germany, Chile, etc.).

¹⁰ For example: Beyond GDP, Genuine Progress Indicator, etc.