



PRESS RELEASE

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FAMILIES ARE PIVOTAL TO ACCELERATE THE TRANSITION TO A CIRCULAR ECONOMY

"Our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this planet... and we all cherish our children's future"
John F Kennedy

On 14th May, we celebrated International Day of Families by hosting a seminar highlighting the importance of engaging mothers and families as changemakers for sustainable development. Policy makers, researchers, civil society representatives and other circular economy practitioners gathered at the European Economic and Social Committee in Brussels to discuss how to accelerate the transition to a circular economy through good practices.

The event was opened by **EESC President Luca Jahier**, by saying: "Looking at the title of this seminar, you have decided to link two concepts which are, despite their multiple connections, not often reflected on jointly: the role of families and mothers in particular and the circular economy as part of the sustainable development". The president stressed out the fact that environmental changes are of increasing concern and require urgent action. He said: 'We must stop living at the cost of our children. Instead, we must create frameworks for sustainable lifestyles - and we must act now'. He added: 'Families focus naturally on the wellbeing of their children. In the domestic domain, despite shifts in society, women are still more often the ones choosing the products, they are at the center of the circular economy'.

MMM President, Anne-Claire de Liedekerke, underlined the 'important role parents play in the family in that they usually transfer their environmental and sustainable consumption patterns onto their children'. By including MMM in a research project on the circular economy, 'the European Union recognizes that working not only for mothers but with mothers can generate systemic changes, because mothers when informed, recognized, supported and listen to are changemakers'.

Hugo Schally, from DG Environment at the European Commission, mentioned how the social inclusion aspect will be the future focus of the circular economy. Growth must be accompanied by social inclusion and equal opportunities policies enabling sustainable lifestyles. Families need to be heard and consulted in the design of these policies to make them relevant and affordable to them. He highlighted the need to show in an easy way the environmental footprint information of products, making it comparable and transparent, through a scoring system with a harmonized methodology validating the environmental claims products have. This way consumers can understand the impact their purchasing decisions have on the planet and the people. He finalized by affirming that we are moving into an economy where waste does not exist and mothers play a very important role in this.

Olalla Michelena, Director of MMM's EU Delegation, advocated for a better participation of families and the recognition of the pivotal role they play in transitioning to a circular economy. Families have to understand that caring for the planet is not just a priority for those who can afford it but crucial for all families. Societies need to train and encourage parents in sustainable practices such as reducing waste, recycling and reuse, eco-friendly habits, use of energy-efficient products, consuming local, sustainable consumption, second hand buying, etc. This knowledge in turn would be transferred to the families and communities they live in. She also presented the ongoing Horizon 2020 [CIRC4life](#) research project MMM is part of and how families/ consumers are integrated in the project.



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Eline Boon, Senior Policy analyst from the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, pointed out the need of collaboration and of multi-stakeholder engagement in this field. She called for innovation in production so that the materials could be safely reused, recycled or composted. She stressed out the necessity of eliminating unnecessary materials and the urgent need of circulating raw materials ensuring that we have the right system, because in the right system we cannot make wrong choices.

Jörg Adamczewski, Board member of Zero Waste France presented their holistic approach to waste. Concerning consumers, they have a programme supporting families to reduce household waste by 50 to 80% and make some savings. One participating family reaches out to 30 to 40 people and Zero Waste France reached 15.000 people in 2018. He concluded that prevention is the highest in the waste hierarchy and that 'overconsumption, resource use & waste are societal & political challenges and citizens and families cannot be asked to hold the baby alone'.

Sylvie Droulans presented the **Zero Carabistouille** initiative to make her family zero waste, producing one jar of waste per year for 4 persons. She highlighted how we all have to become "Consum'actors" by taking 5 steps: Composting, Refusing (waste prevention), Reducing, Reusing and Recycling. This has given purpose to her life, it impacted what and how she purchases and uses products. Now she also promotes her sustainable lifestyle in schools and universities.

Aurelien Marino, cofounder of Happy Hours Market, a new initiative in Brussels to fight food waste. They collect unsold fresh products from shops and sell them in a refrigerated truck at a reduced price. This initiative combines technology (mobile based website) and the social aspect (unsold products are brought to charities). It allows consumers to "save" fresh products that will be normally wasted with a convenient option easily accessible.

The event finally concluded that the focus should not be on replacing the purchase of certain goods or services by more sustainable ones but about transforming consumption patterns by enabling more sustainable lifestyles promoting the implementation of a circular economy. Therefore, governments must listen to families needs' and recommendation and support them through concrete social policies of change and co-create the solutions for the future.

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The European Economic and Social Committee is an institutional consultative body established by the 1957 Treaty of Rome. The Committee has 350 members from across Europe, who are appointed by the Council of the European Union. It represents the various economic and social components of organised civil society. Its consultative role enables its members, and hence the organisations they represent, to participate in the EU decision-making process.

Make Mothers Matter (MMM) is an international apolitical and non-denominational NGO founded in 1947 at UNESCO with UN General Consultative Status with representatives at Un and EU level. Its mission is to promote and support the essential role of mothers for peace and for the social, economic and cultural development of societies. MMM promotes the universality and importance of the economic, social and cultural role of mothers, based on their skills and responsibility as primary educators of their children. MMM articulates its action around two areas: field work via its network and advocacy. In collaboration with its member associations working in the field, MMM acts at international level to influence policy and public opinion in order to bring about positive changes in the lives of mothers. Working for and with mothers by involving them in development projects, has beneficial effects on their children, their families and more broadly on society.
