



108th International Labour Conference
General discussion on the Report of the Director General
Work for a brighter future

A future of work that works for mothers and families

Make Mothers Matter (or MMM) congratulates the ILO on its Centenary anniversary. We also welcome the Director General's report on *Work for a brighter future*.

The multiple challenges our world is facing, which are articulated in the report, already affect the world of work as we have known it. They also often have exacerbated consequences for women, especially when they are mothers.

Among the many excellent recommendations laid out in the report, we at MMM particularly support the following ones.

1. The push for Gender equality

As rightly stated in the report, "The world of work begins at home". The unequal distribution of unpaid family care work in homes and communities – i.e. the "care gap", remains the main structural obstacle to further progress on gender equality. This "time-money-agency conundrum"¹ must be addressed.

In our view, this also means taking motherhood into account in the push for Gender Equality.

MMM calls on governments:

- To provide **accessible, affordable and high-quality public services and infrastructure** – with the explicit objective of addressing women's "time poverty" - including water, electricity, energy, ICTs, transportation, proximity childcare and healthcare.
- To promote **care as valuable work** so that men also embrace careers in care related sectors.
- To promote the equal **sharing of care responsibilities** between men and women; In the short term this means paid paternity leave and shared paid parental leaves, but in the longer term it implies transforming the whole system to adapt to the new realities of fatherhood, including how boys are educated on family roles

2. Investment in human capital

Investment in human capital starts with children. And it also includes the **informal** setting of a family's home where a child acquires attitudes, values, life skills and knowledge from their daily experiences and environment.

Investment in human capital also already begins during **early childhood** when a child's brain develops at its fastest rate, laying the foundation for its organizational development and functioning

¹ As expressed in the 2018 ILO Director General's Report *The Women at work initiative – The push for Gender Equality*

throughout life. These critical early years shape a child's future physical and mental health, with life-long impact not only for themselves, but also for families, communities and societies.

It is therefore of critical importance that the world of work also supports parents with policies that give them **the time and the means to raise their children**. This is especially important during the early years, to ensure the nurturing care², which is so essential for their future.

MMM therefore calls upon governments:

- **To consider public spending on policies that support the unpaid care work of nurturing, raising and educating children, especially during their early years, as an investment**, 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 societies³.

Because caring and educating a child requires time! – MMM also calls upon governments and employers:

- To promote diverse work and family life balance policies accessible to all, **including the right to request flexible working arrangements**, to allow parents and other caregivers to access and stay in paid work while assuming their family responsibilities.
- To adopt policies supporting **quality part-time work and job sharing schemes**, which 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.]
- To recognize and value the **skills which are acquired through caring**, and which notably include organisational and leadership skills⁴.
- To adopt a **life-course perspective** and the facilitation of 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 penalized.

3. The provision of universal social protection

Whether paid or unpaid, **caring is work!**

In addition to a social protection floor, MMM is calling upon governments to build on the *Resolution concerning statistics of work, employment and labour underutilization*⁵, which was adopted in 2013 at the International Conference of Labour Statisticians, to recognize unpaid family care work as a particular category of labour, which gives **status and rights to caregivers**. These include in particular

² See WHO/UNICEF nurturing care framework: <https://nurturing-care.org/>

³ 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>

⁴ See for example <https://www.deseretnews.com/article/900068939/guest-opinion-motherhood-teaches-leadership.html>

⁵ https://www.ilo.org/global/statistics-and-databases/meetings-and-events/international-conference-of-labour-statisticians/19/WCMS_230304/lang--en/index.htm

access to social security, education and training; as well as so-called “care credits” in the calculation of pension rights.

4. [The reshaping of business incentive structures

As rightly stated in the report, the reshaping of business incentive structures to foster wellbeing, environmental sustainability and equality must be done at every level.

We at MMM are particularly concerned by the **inadequacy of GDP**. To begin with, GDP only gives a partial view of the economy since it fails to account for informal work, voluntary work as well as unpaid family work – which incidentally are all mostly “women’s work”. In this sense, we welcome the report’s recommendation to develop and use an indicator of the unpaid work performed in the service of households and communities.

However, GDP has long shown its limitations as an indicator of wellbeing. It also fails to show the environmental degradations that too often come with relentless economic growth.

A more **systemic change** is therefore needed. Qualitative economic growth must be fostered, based on new indicators that monitor both human development and wellbeing, and environmental sustainability.

MMM is calling governments to follow-up on the work of the Stiglitz commission⁶, which was already done 10 years ago, and replace the System of National Accounts, which is at the base of GDP, by new indicators fostering qualitative growth.]

In conclusion

Addressing the multiple challenges faced by our world goes well beyond the labour sector alone and requires a multi-sectorial and concerted approach, also involving the education, health, social welfare, ecology, economic and fiscal sectors.

But the urgent need to address those challenges also provides an opportunity for systemic transformations and a paradigm shift:

- It requires putting care, education, and the wellbeing of people and the planet at the centre of government priorities and policies.
- It also requires moving away from short-termism, taking a long-term perspective and investing in the future, in people and their capabilities - moving away from short term GDP growth and shifting to a new economic model⁷ - based on qualitative economic growth and new indicators of wellbeing and sustainability.

It is time that the world of work adapts to people and families, and that the economy serves the wellbeing of people and the planet - not the other way around.

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 The Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission was established in 2008 by President Sarkozy of France to examine how alternate to GDP could be used to measure the wealth and social progress of a nation. Its final report was published in 2009: https://www.economie.gouv.fr/files/finances/presse/dossiers_de_presse/090914mesure_perf_eco_progres_social/synthese_ang.pdf

⁷ For example: Beyond GDP, Genuine Progress Indicator, etc.