

Annex to the response to the European Commission's public consultation on gender equality in the EU

Make Mothers Matter strongly believes that gender equality will never be achieved until unpaid care work (caring of children, frail, disabled and household tasks) is recognised, reduced and redistributed. The amount of time dedicated by women to care activities (« care gap ») is much higher than men's but this inequality is difficult to prove because no recent and reliable data of the share of unpaid care work in the European households is available. Only some estimates are available and what is not counted 'does not count'.

Out of the 8 domains from EIGE's Gender Equality Index 2017, inequality in the domain of time is persisting and growing and is the only one with a lower score than in 2005 (by 1.0 point). Therefore there is an urgent need for the European Commission to adopt a strategy with clear targets and indicators including impact assessments instead of the actual strategic engagement specifically addressing the domain of time.

Currently, women with children are more subject to an unequal repartition of unpaid care work (care and domestic work) due to gender-based stereotypes which expect them to be the main caregiver and a lack of adequate work-life balance policies and legislation. This inequality is correlated with the availability to perform paid work and has a negative impact on employment, pay, pensions and career as a whole. Therefore, the « motherhood penalty » needs to be specifically addressed with concrete measures in order to tackle this care gap.

Taking into account the results of the survey we conducted with 12,000 mothers in Europe on their priorities¹, observed best practices and other research results, MMM proposes to eliminate the discriminatory consequences of childbirth for mothers and families by asking:

- More TIME to be spent with their family
- To have a real CHOICE including childcare solutions
- Have access to RESOURCES and SERVICES to help them reconcile work and family life
- RECOGNITION of the important role they play in society

1) TIME

Through the general trend towards a rising life expectancy, the traditional life-course and career path must be reconsidered. The stretched working life could benefit from more flexibility with a long-term vision, instead of the "rush-hour" period of intense work and career coupled with having children and starting a young family. Yet less than half of the European workforce (43%) has flexibility in working hours².

¹ What Matters to Mothers in Europe, Survey of Mothers in Europe, 2011 results :

<https://makemothersmatter.org/delegations/europe/what-matters-to-mothers-in-europe/>

² European Quality of Life Survey, 2012: <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/european-quality-of-life-surveys-eqls/european-quality-of-life-survey-2012>

Every time there a parents survey is conducted, they all agree to ask for more time with their families. Therefore, MMM suggests the promotion of a life-course perspective rather than a linear approach, allowing women and men to leave the labour market partially or completely for a definite period of time to care for their children or others, and be able to re-enter it. Reconciliation legislation and policies have to respond to the needs of all generations. The preferred option for a majority of mothers is to combine paid and unpaid work (63% according to our survey). However, parents who wish to look after their children at home can do so. Society as a whole should be concerned about finding solutions to calm the frequent tensions between the demands of paid work and unpaid family care work. Leave schemes should be available not only for working parents who are employees but for all the workforce including self-employed.

The solutions we propose are:

1. Adequately paid **maternity leave** of 6 months at EU level according to ILO recommendations. MMM supports the revision of the Maternity Leave Directive to expand it to from 14 to 26 weeks with 100% payment for the first 16 weeks and then a degressive mechanism.
2. **Paternity leave** of 10 working days paid at least 80% of the last salary and promotion of take up by fathers
3. Paid and flexible **Parental leave** of 4 months per parent (at least at 80% of the last salary) including 2 transferable months to give flexibility to the family similar to the successful Icelandic model. Countries with the highest uptake have partial transferability (Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Denmark etc) and much longer leaves.
4. **Carer's leave** of 5 days per year paid at sick leave level
5. Promoting **flexibility at work** for employees: the right to request flexible working conditions including teleworking, reducing working time, flexible schedules etc, until 18 years of age allowing parents and carers to spend more time with their families. Currently all work-life balance measures are focused on small children but there are limited ones for parents of teenagers who also need parental support. If they are still legally minors, parents should be able to take time to care also for teenagers who demand a presence of their parents specially when they return home. It is important to be available when they feel the need to speak. They may need extra support to avoid school dropout, dealing with bullying situations or contacts with drugs etc. Several EU countries already have it.
6. Have **specific measures adapted to parents in vulnerable or more challenging** situations such as single parents, multiple births, migrants, parents with disabled children, divorced etc. For instance, it should be possible to have an extension of leaves or the possibility for single parents to take all months of parental leave or a longer paternity leave in case of twins. Therefore, it needs to be possible to transfer a part of the parental leave pay to the child's primary carer (if the other partner or parent is not able to take it). This is the case in Australia where the primary carer can get some leave transferred in case of divorced parents.

7. Promote the **share of caring responsibilities** by encouraging men to take on a higher share of family and caring responsibilities within the home. This can be done by designing policies in accordance with what families and fathers demand to increase the uptake of leaves by fathers and men in general: good remuneration, clear eligibility criteria, eliminating tax disincentives and flexibility. These are crucial features as suggested by the EC research on Paternity and Parental leave policies across the EU³. This will in turn have a positive impact on both women's employment and family responsibilities⁴.

2) CHOICE

Mothers and families need to have an economically-feasible choice between an outsourced care solution or an in-family care solution enabling them to take care of their under school-age children themselves without being penalised. The current standard model, based on economic criteria, make it difficult for women to raise children while being full-time employed. Choice means the possibility to adjust their working lives according to the needs of each child, the age and number of children.

This adjustability of working hours should not be identified solely with part-time working which is currently the more usual way for mothers to reach a minimal balance between their private and professional lives. This is not a sustainable solution since it means on the long run, reduced social rights which usually results on lower pensions for women.

Therefore, it is necessary to adopt comprehensive work-life balance policies including leave schemes, affordable, accesible and quality childcare, long-term care facilities for older and disabled persons etc. so women don't have to compensate for the lack of these policies with their unpaid care work.

The measures we propose are:

1. The **free choice of parents and caregivers** to be able to devote some time of their lives to their family responsibilities and adjust their working lives accordingly.
2. Create a better **EU legal framework for part-time work** (where women are overrepresented) in order to ensure equality and the improvement of the quality of part-time jobs enabling them to have a decent pension. At EU level, this will need the revision of the Working Time Directive or the Part-time work Directive to include conciliation measures.
3. MMM supports **initiatives and measures adopted by companies** to help employees better reconcile work and family life as part of their CSR policy. For instance, the EFR certificate, an audit of internal policies based on ISO standards which have an impact on work-life balance promoted by our member MásFamilia Foundation, and supported by the Spanish Ministry of Health and Social Policy. It has already helped more than 600 organisations

³ European Commission report on Paternity and parental leave policies across the European Union 2016 done by Janna van Belle RAND

⁴ European Reconciliation Package : 2014 Year of Reconciling Work and Family Across Europe', COFACE, March 2015 : http://www.coface-eu.org/en/upload/ERP/ERP_COFACE_2015_web.pdf

(companies, universities, municipalities etc) to implement a new work culture allowing for better harmony between work, family and personal spheres. It has shown that companies which have conciliation policies have better productivity, retention rate and lower absenteeism and accidents.

3) RESOURCES

It is also necessary to develop and make available to families the necessary financial resources and incentives in order to make it possible to better balance their private and professional lives. Women are still « second earners » in a majority of European households which prevents them from joining the labour market in equal conditions as men and assuming care activities should no longer result in a worsening of their financial situation. There is also an urgent need for measures addressing the stress put on families by the difficulties of combining work and care activities and the negative consequences it can have on their physical and mental health and breaking up couples.

The principle of equal pay is included in the treaties since more than 60 years and it is not evolving fast enough. We must find a new way to approach this issue. Population in Europe is ageing so the need of care will only increase and the care gap as well. Women carers will not be able to remain in the workforce if Member states do not support them in their caring activities by creating more, qualitative, accessible and affordable childcare facilities, support of informal carers (respite care, training etc), and other work-life balance policies.

There is therefore a need for measures such as:

1. Promote more **fair and equitable tax systems** notably by eliminating the second earner status which is a disincentive for women to join the labour market. In a study⁵ from 30 OECD countries, it was confirmed that when higher tax rates are applied to secondary earners (generally women) they reduce their labour force participation and have a negative effect on their employment outcomes. For instance, France has a comprehensive taxation policy in favor of families. In particular, it provides a wide range of subsidized childcare services and a generous and varied allowances system, especially for large families. Large families also benefit from significant tax breaks. A specific principle, the "family quotient", especially favours families with at least three children as the tax unit is not the individual but the household.
2. Encourage the **reform of national tax systems** which can produce disincentives to take leaves schemes
3. Removing **unfair indirect taxation** by reducing VAT for early childhood products and services such as nappies, pacifiers, bottles etc. A change in VAT could be the subject of a recommendation by the Commission or the Council, and the compensations required by such a scheme studied at European level. Calling for this sort of measure would have major effects in both the short and long term for families in Europe.

⁵ OECD, Closing the Gender Gap: Act Now (2012)

4. **Child and family benefits and allowances** such as the provision of universal child benefits for all families, designed as a right for all children. For instance, in Finland a flexible allowance on childcare is the most commonly used social services among families. As every child under school age has a right to day care, all families have access to free universal daycare for children age eight months to five years, a policy that has been in place since 1990. This childcare is also flexible, providing the option of full-day childcare centres, as well as municipal playgrounds with adult supervision where parents can accompany the child. In addition, the government can also give the allowance to parents who stay at home and provide ‘home daycare’ for the first three years.
5. Tackle **gender-based discrimination** due to caring responsibilities in the labour market and promote pay transparency and clarify the notion of “equal work”, “work of equal value” and “indirect discrimination” to tackle the gender paygap
6. As part of the EU Semester process include in the **country specific recommendations** measures to tackle the **gender pay gap** and fight gender stereotypes

4. SERVICES

In order to ensure that mothers and fathers are able to remain in the workforce after the birth of their child, it is necessary that a number of services such as daycare centres or other solutions are available and are also accessible and with a high quality. The provision of community-based care services is also key to reduce and distribute unpaid care work.

Therefore, we propose:

1. To increase the number and variety of **affordable, accessible, flexible and qualitative childcare** adapted to parents' schedules including early childhood care and education, emergency childcare, baby-sitting services, care services for sick children, multi-purpose childcare facilities, out-of hours and out-of school childcare, employer supported childcare etc. Childcare solutions should be available until mandatory school age. Almost 60% of European parents identify cost and availability (including waiting lists and/or lack of services) as difficulties impacting the use of childcare⁶. At EU level, there is a need to ensure compliance with the Barcelona childcare targets⁷, which are currently not being respected in all countries or even review those targets.
2. Promotion of **affordable, accessible and quality care services** (long-term care for disabled and elderly people) using EU funds and allowing families to choose the best option for them. The EU could encourage Member states through the country specific recommendations in the EU semester to ensure availability of childcare solutions and long-term care facilities.

⁶ ‘Q&A : Report on childcare provision in the Member States and study on the gender pension gap’, European Commission memo, June 2013 : http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-13-490_en.htm

⁷ Presidency Conclusions, Barcelona European Council, 15 & 16 March, 2002:
http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/71025.pdf

5. RECOGNITION

Informal care work, provided by friends and family, predominantly women, represent 80% of informal care activities across Europe. These carers face serious consequences, when their work is not recognized or valued, including the reduction of opportunities to access formal employment and experience career progression, as well as a greater risk of poverty, particularly in old age⁸. It is not acceptable that this valuable work is not quantified, evaluated or recognised in GDP. Care work needs to be considered as work and give access to social rights notably pension rights where mothers have to suffer from very low incomes and a high dependence to their partner's pension due to their retreat from the work force in order to take care of their families.

Mothers and others coming out of family-related career breaks face significant challenges in finding a job in line with their qualifications, given the existing labour market penalties.

We propose as solutions:

1. Regularly conduct accurate national **Time-Use Surveys** to measure unpaid family care work and its distribution between men and women in order to calculate its contribution to the economy. The aim is to estimate the economic value of unpaid care work and its inclusion in the calculation of GDP as an alternative value (satellite account). The report from Special UN rapporteur on poverty and human rights, Magdalena Sepulveda, says that estimates on unpaid care work would constitute between 10 and 50% of GDP if assigned as a monetary value⁹.
2. **Validation of informal skills** acquired when performing family work to facilitate the return to the labour market as proposed in the Famcompass EU funded project. In 2009, an instrument was developed and funded under the EU Grundtvig Programme to validate the skills obtained in the family context, the FamCompass (Assessing and Validating Family Skills), and its use should be promoted¹⁰.
3. Compensate for the time spent on caregiving in pensions by recognising this time as "**care credits**", so it is accounted for when calculating retirement pensions to increase its amount. In Germany, article 249 SGB VI from the Social Code recognises that a parent who has stayed at home up to 3 years to take care of children during this period will also generate pension

⁸ 'European Reconciliation Package: 2014 Year of Reconciling Work and Family Across Europe', COFACE, March 2015 : http://www.coface-eu.org/en/upload/ERP/ERP_COFACE_2015_web.pdf

⁹ [1] Debbie Budlender, "The statistical evidence on care and non-care work across six countries", UNRISD Gender and Development Programme, Paper No. 4, December 2008, and other sources, as cited in the UNSR report, p.3 (footnote 4). - See more at: <http://www.unwomen.org/ru/news/stories/2013/10/special-rapporteur-positions-unpaid-care-work-as-major-human-rights-issue#sthash.4Yf30u56.dpuf>

¹⁰ A Multilateral Cooperation Project in the 'Lifelong Learning Program' of the European Commission – Grundtvig I - Education and Culture DG The 'Family Competences Portfolio', in short 'FamCompass', assesses 'family competences', competences men and women have obtained in family life, in their roles as educators, home makers and care givers. Family competences are valuable human resources. Tested in seven European countries, the FamCompass guarantees a transparent and objective assessment of these informally acquired competences. It can be used to facilitate the intake for education and training programmes, grant exemptions and shorten training pathways and validate family competences on the labour market. See www.famcompass.eu



credits (1 or 3 depending if the children are born before or after 1992). This means mothers or fathers will have a better pension as a result of this time that was allocated for caregiving.

4. Give the possibility for caregivers to work part time but **contribute full time to** pension schemes to avoid poverty in old age
5. Facilitate access to **life-long learning and re-skilling** after a career break due to caregiving reasons as it can enable their retry into the labour market. For instance, in Belgium some training courses are not available for mothers returning to the labour market, but only for the unemployed.