



## **Consultation on the Validation of non-formal and informal learning – evaluation**

The European Commission launched a public consultation in August 2019 on the question how Member States are validating non-formal and informal learning and in particular how the 2012 EU Council Recommendation on this topic is put into practice.

Make Mothers Matter acknowledges that the European Union has made and continues to make important efforts in this field. We nevertheless feel there is more that could be done.

The Council Recommendation, defining **eight key competencies that are crucial to better prepare people for today's societies**, is an important step. The Council of the European Union on Education (8 November 2019) highlighted the key role of lifelong learning policies in empowering societies to address the technological and green transition in support of inclusive and sustainable growth.

### **More support for women**

These policies need to take into account women, especially mothers, who in many cases have devoted time to caring duties and whose skills are considered "out of the labour market". The skills of many women are still undervalued, either because society is not aware of them or because they are not considered as economically important. Caring for children or for the elderly and taking time off from work endangers the career development of the person making that decision. Investing in the future generation does not get any particular recognition and is not considered to procure any material value to society.

Maternity develops in women a new set of skills, especially **soft skills**. These skills need to be recognized also on the labour market. This new set of skills comes basically through non-formal and informal learning.

Many women lose their jobs when they become mothers and many mothers have difficulties finding a job. Policies need to change in order to provide this part of the population the **recognition of their skills learned or acquired while caring for others and improving the wellbeing of society as a whole**.

As this European project shows <https://skillstools.eu/mom/>



"There is plenty of scientific and sociological evidence demonstrating that motherhood is a moment of intellectual development, skill growth and explosion of energies. If only for the simple fact that nature is concerned with propagating life and therefore it endows new mothers with enhanced abilities and survival instincts. Moreover, there is a clear affinity between the complex environment that a parent needs to manage within the family (regarding the intensity of the relationships, the development of authority, motivational and listening skills, etc.) and the modern workplaces, that nowadays require more and more empathic and interpersonal skills".

At the recent ILO event in Geneva, 8 November 2019, "100 years of Maternity protection" we learned from the HR Manager of Danone in Milan about their very interesting and successful program for new parents in the company. After 8 years of the so-called "**Maternity as master program**" in the company, these are some of the astonishing results:

100% of mothers returned to work, 7,5% more children were born, 45% of managers are mothers (compared to 5% in 2011), 42% mothers promoted when back to work, 100% of dads benefit from paternity leave of 10 days (versus 4 days by law), 85% of mothers breastfeed, 0,7% of absenteeism (versus 5,4 % in Italy), 76% of the new mothers and fathers in the company are participating in the master, 83% said their soft skills have improved, 79% feel more energised, 75% feel more engaged with the company, 35% have more ability to manage priorities and timing, 35% have more empathy, 35% more ability to delegate, 15% have more ability to take decisions, 20% have more mental agility, 10% more ability to manage complexity.

The company believes motherhood not only is not an impediment in a company, but that mothers have specific skills and talents to bring to the job.

### **Early education and care centers are not the only solution**

At the same time, there is an increasing discussion about having more "high-quality early education and care centers", which children can attend after the parental leave (in some countries this can start when the child is 3 months old). We consider that a **real conciliation between work and family life** should give the parents (in the majority of cases, the mother), the **possibility of choosing freely** when and how to work, especially during the first years of life of their children. Governments should support those decisions, not by giving more weight to one or the other choice. Governments cannot, on the one hand, give financial support to



families to pay for day care centers and, on the other, no financial support and no recognition when it is a parent who does that job.

Helping women, and families, to reconcile better their work and their family life does not mean that all children have to attend early childhood education and care centers. The **schemes should be flexible enough** for parents to ask for part time, teleworking, or longer parental leaves, without risking to be left with uninteresting work, or to lose the possibility to be promoted or pension and social rights, or for women to have greater gender pay and pension gaps.

Too many mothers still suffer from a **motherhood penalty** and governments should do more than just create centers to "get rid" of the obstacle in the career.

**Parents should be able to achieve the recognition of the skills acquired when taking care of a child or elderly person of the family, which are many. They should be able to profit from flexible paths of training, up-skilling, etc.**

## Competences

The Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning defines competences as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Key competences are those needed for personal development, employability, social inclusion and active citizenship.

Among the eight key competences mentioned we know that in the domains of STEM, digital literacy and entrepreneurial attitudes women are lagging behind men. We need education systems and life long learning opportunities where women can be integrated and fully taken into account also in those fields.

Even though more women are participating in the economy and have enormous economic potential, they continue to be deprived of opportunities for economic empowerment, equal salaries or leadership positions.

The economy and society at large could benefit from their talent, resourcefulness and all those skills acquired in the diverse choices they make throughout their lives.

There is a need to support comprehensive strategies to address the main barriers by including and respecting the particular needs of families, and in particular of



women.

There should be truly flexible pathways, up-skilling and re-skilling and especially the recognition of those "other" less tangible skills that are as important and valuable as the others.

In France, a system of Validation of Acquired Experience (VAE) was introduced in September 2015. It allows anyone to obtain a professional certification by validating his/her experience acquired in the context of a professional and/or extra-professional activity. To request the validation of the achievements of his/her experience, it is necessary to have exercised a salaried, non-salaried, or voluntary activity (<https://travail-emploi.gouv.fr/formation-professionnelle/certification-competences-pro/vae>).

Lifelong Learning should be recognised as important for the whole population. A strong economic framework should also accompany it as well as an understanding that learning does not happen only in a classroom.

### **The green target**

Within the green targets that Europe has foreseen for the next decades we need to recognise the important role that women play. It is estimated that women make over 80% of consumer purchasing decisions in families in developed countries. In addition, OECD studies of household behaviour show that women tend to be more sustainable consumers; they are more likely to recycle, buy organic food and eco-labelled products and place a higher value on energy-efficient transport. Women, and particularly mothers, play a key role in promoting sustainable practices among their children, family and the communities they live in. Mothers play a pivotal role in transitioning to a circular economy.

They also have a multiplying effect, as they will transfer this knowledge to the families and communities they live in.

Therefore all these sustainability or "green" skills need to be included and recognised alongside the other traditional skills.

### **Common and coordinated Strategy**

Europe needs to develop a common strategy of best practices and models, which allow all citizens, and women in particular, to be able to use within the labour market and in society all the skills acquired throughout their lives.

