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### Commission on the Status of Women

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to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly  
entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and  
peace for the twenty-first century”

### **Statement submitted by Make Mothers Matter, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

### Empowering mothers with the Beijing Platform for Action

At the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, governments adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, where they committed to taking action in 12 critical areas of concern to advance women's rights and achieve gender equality. On the occasion of the review and appraisal of the implementation of this landmark text, Make Mother Matter presents this written statement to highlight the specific perspectives of women in their role as mothers, with a particular focus on three areas of concern: women and the economy, women and poverty, and education and training of women.

As the only international non-governmental organization voicing the concerns of mothers from all around the world, Make Mothers Matter would like to emphasize paragraph 29 of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action: "The social significance of maternity, motherhood and the role of parents in the family and in the upbringing of children should be acknowledged. The upbringing of children requires shared responsibility of parents, women and men and society as a whole. Maternity, motherhood, parenting and the role of women in procreation must not be a basis for discrimination nor restrict the full participation of women in society. Recognition should also be given to the important role often played by women in many countries in caring for other members of their family."

Twenty-five years on, and despite progress in some areas, women continue to suffer penalties and discriminations linked to maternity, and the essential social and economic contributions of women in their role as mothers still remain largely unrecognized and unaccounted for.

We at Make Mothers Matter would like to reiterate our call to address two issues that particularly constraint women's economic participation when they are mothers:

1. The inequitable distribution of unpaid family care work, which is fueled by adverse social norms: more than two decades after Beijing, women still take on about three times more unpaid work than men, which remains the main obstacle to their participation in the labour force.
2. The barriers that women face to participating in the economy, especially when they are mothers: discriminatory laws and practices and an economic environment that remains largely family-unfriendly.

Make Mothers Matter's recommendations below show that addressing these two issues requires multiple and cross-sectoral policies and measures.

Addressing the inequitable distribution of unpaid family care work, using the recognize-reduce-redistribute framework:

1. Provide accessible, affordable, and high-quality public services and infrastructure, in particular in the most disadvantaged, rural, and remote areas, with a focus on addressing the issue of women's "time poverty". Water, electricity, energy, information and communications technology, transportation, and proximity to childcare and health care are all necessary to significantly reduce the time spent on unpaid family care work, which is mostly supported by women, and thus liberate time for remunerated activities.
2. Promote and support equal sharing of care responsibilities between men and women (e.g., through paid paternity leave, shared parental leave, raising awareness and provide education on the importance of their

implication for children). This will allow men to take care of their children from the start, which will more likely continue during the whole childhood.

3. Make unpaid family care work visible to policymakers and society at large by regularly conducting time-use surveys that show how men and women distribute their time between paid and unpaid work. In particular, time-use surveys should be used to conduct systematic gender impact assessments of macroeconomic policies, especially regarding women's unpaid care work. For example, austerity measures, which have been implemented by many governments following the financial crisis, have had a disproportionately negative impact on women, as cuts in social services often resulted in an increase in women's unpaid care workload.
4. Based on time-use surveys, assess the monetary value of this essential but invisible work as a percentage of the gross domestic product (GDP) – estimated at 10–50 per cent – and communicate this value to raise general awareness of women's unpaid care work.
5. Include unpaid family care work in alternate economic and social indicators to GDP, which are currently under consideration to measure well-being and shift to new economic models that prioritize the well-being of people and the planet (Beyond GDP, Genuine Progress Indicator).
6. Building on the resolution adopted at the 2013 International Labour Organization (ILO) Conference of Labour Statisticians, legally recognize unpaid family care work as a particular category of labour that gives rights (e.g., access to social security, education and training, and more).
7. In particular, recognize the periods dedicated to unpaid family care work in the calculation of pension rights (“care credits”), as these periods are essential to the well-being of societies.

Facilitating women's participation in the economy to foster economic independence and alleviate poverty:

1. Promote policies to reconcile work and family life that apply to women and men – in addition to paid maternity, paternity, and parental leave that are specific to parents, the right to request flexible arrangements, which originated in the United Kingdom, is an example of good practice.
2. Facilitate discontinuous career paths rather than linear ones, allowing both men and women to leave the labour market partially or completely during certain periods of their lives to educate and care for their children or care-dependent relatives, and then return to work without being heavily penalized. With rising life expectancy, the traditional life course and career path should be reconsidered. Instead of the “rush-hour” period of intense work and career coupled with starting a family and having children, this stretched working life could benefit from more flexibility with a long-term vision.
3. In particular, recognize and validate the competencies and skills acquired and developed while performing unpaid family care work to facilitate the re-entry into the labour market after a career break.
4. Facilitate access to lifelong education to ensure that women of all ages can acquire and develop the knowledge, capacities, aptitudes, and skills needed to fully participate in the paid labour market, especially after a career break linked to maternity.

5. Promote the regulation of quality part-time work and job sharing schemes that allow men and women to adjust their workload to their family responsibilities, and eliminate any type of discrimination against part-time workers (who are mainly mothers) regarding career advancement, pay level, social security, pension rights, and more.
6. Address the “motherhood penalty”, beginning with all the discrimination and obstacles linked to maternity that women face in the world of work, whether at hiring, in perceived competences, or when it comes to promotion. Address, in particular, the motherhood wage gap, i.e. the pay gap between mothers and women without children. It is higher than the Gender Pay Gap, often increases with the number of children and directly impacts on the pensions of mothers in old age – for example, in the European Union, the average pension gap between men and women stands at 39 per cent.
7. Reform discriminatory legislation and practices to enable women’s right to full and equal access to economic resources, including access to credit and other financial services, ownership of land and other property, right to inheritance, and more. Review tax systems that penalize the second household earner – usually the mother – or even discourage any economic participation.
8. Support women’s entrepreneurship through training, including training on digital and financial literacy, and access to public procurement and mentoring. This is particularly important for mothers, as many of them choose to establish their own businesses to have more flexibility (“mompreneurs” phenomenon).

The benefits of policies that foster a more equitable distribution of both paid and unpaid care work between men and women and a better balance between work and family life for both men and women, which allow parents to better assume their caring and educational responsibilities, go well beyond gender equality. They have broader ripple positive effects on the whole of society and even on businesses and the economy.

In particular, these policies should be seen as an investment in childhood and human capital that drives positive impact and returns on investment in many other areas: prevention of poverty; prevention of social and health problems linked to burnout and stress; prevention of violence and school dropout, prevention of delinquency and drug consumption, and more.

At Make Mothers Matter, we believe it is high time to make the vision of the landmark Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action a reality, as well as to acknowledge and support the multiple roles of women as mothers, citizens, and economic agents.

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