



UfM Women4Mediterranean Conference 2020

17 November 2020

Plenary Session: Women on the Frontline of COVID-19

*"To what extent the Covid-19 is helping to make more visible
the problematic of caring and education?"*

Is it helping to position care and education at the center of the government's agenda?"

I would like to address care and education not as problems but as most necessary resources for our present and our future. Care has become a problem and that's the problem. Care is not a problem.

Care is a Necessity: we all need care/ and at certain times in our lives our survival depends on care.

Care is a Treasure: caring for each other is not only necessary it is also the one thing that makes us happy.

Care is a Resource: indispensable to support the world's economies. But at the same time care, and particularly unpaid care work mostly performed by women (mothers) is not accounted for in GDP and is at the core of gender inequalities.

The pandemic has exacerbated inequalities. I will refer to only some to stick to my point. Because when inequalities apply to care and education, a part of the world's population is excluded from their future and that will have a direct impact on all of us

Who pays the price of the pandemic?

The most vulnerable people in general, **children** in particular:

- ⇒ Children who will immediately be sent back to work upon the closing of their school and will never go back to school
- ⇒ Girls who will be married and never go back to school
- ⇒ Children victims of abuse and domestic violence
- ⇒ Children who don't benefit from their parents' support and reassurance but on the contrary are victims of their parents' extreme stress
- ⇒ Children who don't have access to digitalization
- ⇒ Children whose schools don't have the means to reopen under the required safety measures

Women/mothers also pay the price

⇒ Care is costly and the cost is unfairly distributed. Mothers are generally paying an unfair share and that has been dramatized by the effect of the pandemic. During confinements parents had to care for their children while doing their job from home. This has had a superior impact on mothers' employment than on fathers' employment, reinforcing the rightly called "motherhood pay gap"

Paradoxically one of the very few good news about the pandemic is that it has made **more visible how important care and education are**. People have actually seen care upfront. It has shown men and women, but also their employers, that care is a responsibility that concerns us all and cannot be ignored. It is time to talk about our collective responsibility for care.



The United Nations Secretary General said: *“The pandemic has shown us who is doing the work that really matters: nurses, teachers, care workers. (As MMM president I insist on adding mothers and fathers!) As we recover, we need to remember this. It is time to end the inequities of unpaid care work and create new economic models that work for everyone”*

The pandemic gives all governments an opportunity to realize what really matters and implement measures according to that. That will require courage and imagination. Priorities will have to be made.

Care and education have to become priorities. We need **care and education-led** recovery measures. All policy decisions should be “care & education proofed”, in other words their implications on care and education must be assessed.

Spending on care and education must be seen as investments not expenses.

Allow me to present three suggestions about

1. Early Childhood Development
2. Gross Domestic Product
3. Regular people, all of us, as drivers for change.

1. ECD

⇒ Priority needs to be given to projects and people involved in **Early Childhood Development (ECD)** to mitigate the immediate and long-term effects of the pandemic. Because “When we change the beginning of the story, we change the whole story”

Cost benefit analysis have consistently shown that investing in ECD is the most powerful investment a country can make with a sizable impact on economic growth.

2. GDP

⇒ Our current economic system fails to recognize the essential role of care and education, especially of unpaid care work. Governments need to be creative and move beyond GDP to prioritize care and education for wellbeing, sustainability and equity in our economy, using indicators more related to the human wellbeing.

A few countries are members of the Wellbeing Economy Alliance: Scotland, Wales, Iceland and New Zealand (all governments lead by women) The Wellbeing Economy Alliance believes that **humanity** should determine economics, not the other way around.

Currently the GDP measurement of our economies is being discussed with alternative indicators. MMM joined the Wellbeing Economy Alliance, and we want that the new system [that will hopefully replace GDP one day] includes care and education, not only as indicators, but as cornerstones.

3. Drivers for change

⇒ Children, women, men, mothers, fathers and families can be the driving force for change. The importance of parents must be recognized and Family Laws enacted and enforced to uphold their rights.

⇒ We can all be drivers for change.



After witnessing the greatest education emergency of our lifetime, campaigns are being launched to protect formal education all over the world.

For example the **Save our Future campaign** was created because “The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the education of over 90% of the world’s students. It has exacerbated already existing inequalities and magnified the global learning crisis. The future of an entire generation is at risk. But while education is clearly a victim of the pandemic, it is also the solution to the longer-term recovery.”

MMM launched the **#RaiseAPen campaign** to protect the right to education for women and girls in Afghanistan at a critical time in the country’s history. We can all participate because ultimately standing for girls’ education is Afghanistan is standing for girls’ education everywhere.

And MMM is committed to the right to education, especially for women and girls who are particularly at risk of dropping out of school: it is the key to reducing growing inequalities in these pandemic times, and to building a fairer world. Mothers dedicate themselves on a daily basis to ensuring that their children can go to school providing them with the opportunity to lead a dignified life, realize their dreams and reach their full potential. We also know that educated mothers have healthier and more educated children.

Look around you, check those campaigns, participate...

Building back better is the responsibility of all governments but is also our collective and individual responsibility to care. Another positive effect of the pandemic is that in many families, parents and children have actually enjoyed spending more time together.

Creativity and imagination will be needed to build back better and pursue the common good.

Caring for each other will make a difference and particularly caring for children because their future is in our hands and our future is in their hands.