

**Make Mothers Matter’s Contribution to the European Commission
Consultation “Have your say on reinforcing Social Europe”**

27th of November 2020

Contents

I.	Introduction	1
II.	Key principles	2
	1. Education, training and life-long learning	2
	A. Context	2
	B. What we call for	3
	C. Recommendations	3
	2. Gender equality.....	4
	A. Context	4
	B. What we call for	4
	C. Recommendations	4
	4. Active support to employment	5
	A. Context	5
	B. What we call for	6
	C. Recommendations	6
	9. Work-life balance	6
	I. Maternity leave policies	7
	II. Paternity and parental leave policies	7
	III. Childcare services and informal care of children	8
	IV. Flexible working arrangements	8
	V. Work-Life balance conceptualisation.....	9
	11. Childcare and support to children	9
	I. Childcare services.....	9
	II. Support to children	12
	15. Old age income and pensions	12
	A. Context	12
	B. What we call for	13
	C. Recommendations	13
	19. Housing and assistance for the homeless	14
	A. Context	14
	B. What we call for	14
	C. Recommendations	15
	Bibliography.....	16

I. Introduction

The Covid-19 crisis has hit mothers particularly hard.

The reason for that is rooted in the **unequal distribution of care** and other responsibilities within the household. In almost half of the EU countries, women spend at least twice as much time caring for their children as men do.¹ Women with children under 7 years of age on average spend 20 hours per week more than men on unpaid work.² As such, mothers are **more affected by increased care duties during the Covid-19 crisis**.

In the context of the pandemic and imposed lockdown, **the demand for unpaid care work and informal education has increased** and reinforced pre-existing gender inequalities in sharing this essential work. This important increase in unpaid care work puts working **mothers** and other **women with caring responsibilities** in a **difficult situation**, to which they adapt in different ways. One way of adapting is by reducing working hours or even temporarily giving up paid work to meet growing household demands. Reducing or even giving up the female's – rather than the male's – paid work better fits still existing traditional gender norms but it can also be financially more rational as women usually contribute less to the household income than their partners do and often hold more flexible jobs.³

Recent literature⁴ has documented that gender inequalities in earnings and income are closely related to care duties for children, which fall disproportionately on mothers. The COVID-19 crisis shifted care duties back into private households and will have more severe negative effects on women's income, as they take on this duty at the cost of their labour market participation, thus losing current and future income.⁵ It also hinders their opportunities to engage in learning activities.⁶ This is the translation of **the motherhood penalty** suffered by women with children.

The pressure to respond to the increased care duties by reducing employment can be **especially severe for single mothers**. Across the EU-27, 15 % of all households with children are single-parent households, the majority of which are headed by mothers. Single-parent households are already at an increased risk of poverty. The COVID-19 crisis will further **increase existing vulnerabilities** of already vulnerable households.

The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) sets a framework for a socially just and fair society based on several key principles. Several of these principles are of utmost importance to the economic empowerment and social protection of mothers. They include:

- Education, training, and life-long learning
- Gender equality

¹ Eurofound., "European Quality of Life Survey", 2016, Available at <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/data/european-quality-of-life-survey>.

² EIGE, "Gender Equality Index; Index score for European Union for 2020", 2020.

³ Z.BLASKÓ., E. PAPADIMITRIOU., A. MANCA., "How will the COVID-19 crisis affect existing gender divides in Europe?", Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020.

⁴ T. M. ALON, M. DOEPKE, J. Olmstead-Rumsey, and M. TERTILT, "The impact of COVID-19 on gender equality", 2020; EIGE, "Tackling the gender pay gap: not without a better work-life balance", 2019.

⁵ Z.BLASKÓ., E. PAPADIMITRIOU., A. MANCA., "How will the COVID-19 crisis affect existing gender divides in Europe?", op.cit.

⁶ EIGE., *op.cit.*, p.123.



- Active support to employment
- Work-life balance
- Childcare and support to children
- Old age income and pensions
- Housing and assistance for the homeless

Considering the importance of the above principles to the economic empowerment and social protection of mothers, *Make Mothers Matter* (MMM) welcomes the EC public consultation on the implementation of the EPSR.

For each of the principles listed above, we will give some background information on how they affect mothers (context), describe the guiding principles behind our recommendations (what we call for) and finally make some recommendations.

As a member of the Social Platform and the Alliance for Investing in Children, *MMM* has also contributed to their answer to this European Commission Consultation.⁷

II. Key principles

1. Education, training and life-long learning

A. Context

According to EIGE, **time** is the biggest barrier preventing men and women from engaging in lifelong learning. **Care responsibilities** and household duties are highlighted as key time issues.⁸ Mothers in the EU undertake the bulk of care duties. This has implications for their employment opportunities, involvement in social, leisure and cultural activities but also their **participation in lifelong learning**. On average, 40 % of women in the EU who faced obstacles to participating in education and training activities, could not take part due to family responsibilities.⁹ As reported by EIGE, "*women consistently report that they cannot participate in lifelong learning because of their family responsibilities.*"¹⁰

However, while caring for others, mothers develop a new set of skills, called **soft skills**. As the Erasmus + project MOM¹¹ states: "*there is plenty of scientific and sociological evidence demonstrating that motherhood is a moment of intellectual development, skill growth and explosion of energies. 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*".

Unfortunately, these skills are **undervalued**, either because our society is not aware of them or because they are not considered as economically important.

⁷ See <https://www.socialplatform.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Social-Platform-report-on-the-European-Pillar-of-Social-Rights-Action-Plan-with-visuals-final.pdf> and <http://www.alliance4investinginchildren.eu/partners/>

⁸ EIGE., "Gender Equality Index 2019; Work-life balance ", 2019, available at <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-equality-index-2019-report/lifelong-learning>.

⁹ EIGE., *ibid*.

¹⁰ EIGE., Index 2020 *op.cit.*, p.123.

¹¹ MOM (Maternity Opportunities and Mainstreaming) Project., <https://www.eu-mom.eu/en/public/215>.

B. What we call for

The issues of better work—life balance and higher participation in lifelong learning are high on the EU agenda, however “potential synergies and conflicts between them are rarely discussed.”¹² Continuous learning is crucial for both women and men, but finding the time to maintain and increase skills and knowledge is challenging, especially for mothers. **Better work—life policies** would therefore “free up time for continuous investment and growth in people’s skills and knowledge”.¹³

In addition, **maternity** is a **learning experience** that provides mothers with **soft skills** that contribute to **social inclusion, personal development, empowerment, and employability**. Recognising and validating this new set of skills acquired through non-formal and informal learning would require a lifecycle approach to education.

Some examples of recognition and/or validation of soft skills acquired while doing unpaid care work include:

- The MAAM Tool¹⁴ – Maternity as a Master, is a digital tool aimed at measuring and enhancing the improved skills of employees, during and after, parental leave. It serves enterprises and employers to better acknowledge the soft skills acquired through maternity and when becoming a parent¹⁵
- The FamCompass³⁴ - is an EU funded project which has developed an instrument to validate the skills obtained in the family context. This instrument assesses ‘family competences’, competences men and women have obtained in family life, in their roles as educators, homemakers and caregivers
- The MOM Project¹⁶, a European Project financed by Erasmus+ whose aim is to frame maternity as a learning experience that provides mothers with soft skills that are extremely useful in nowadays workforce
- A system of Validation of Acquired Experience (VAE)¹⁷ was introduced in France in 2015. It allows anyone to obtain a professional certification by validating experience acquired in the context of a professional and/or extra-professional activity

C. Recommendations

- a) More synergies between work-life balance and lifelong learning policies:

The implementation of the work-life balance Directive in member countries is an important step, as better work—life policies would give parents more time to engage in continuous learning to maintain and increase their skills and knowledge. While implementing the Directive, national legislators should **consider potential synergies between work-life balance and continuous learning**. Considering the family responsibilities parents have, they should be able to **benefit from flexible paths of training, upskilling and re-skilling**. **Access to lifelong learning should be made easier**, especially for parents, as this would facilitate their return to the labour market after a career-break due to care responsibilities.

¹² EIGE., Index 2019., *op.cit.*

¹³ EIGE., *ibid.*

¹⁴ <https://lifeed.io/en/the-method/the-research/>

¹⁵ At the end of the program users have completed the “Life-Based Learning,” a learning method that shows people how they can use these same soft skills to be more effective at work and at home. By day-by-day activities, they learn to apply these skills to real-life work situations.

¹⁶ MOM (Maternity Opportunities and Mainstreaming) Project., *op.cit.*

¹⁷ The VINCE Project, <https://vince.eucen.eu/validation-in-europe/france-2/>

- b) On the recognition of soft skills acquired by parents while caring for others, we recommend:
- Employers and policymakers to recognise that unpaid care work, including maternity, is a **learning experience** that provides carers with **soft skills** that contribute to **social inclusion, personal development, empowerment, and employability**¹⁸
 - **Raising awareness** about the advantages of validation of skills and the relevance of non-formal and informal learning to acquire them
 - **Mapping and raising awareness about the existing tools for validation of skills acquired doing unpaid care work** such as the MAAM program and the outputs of the MOM project and FamCompass project
 - To include in the **ESF+ dedicated funding** to support targeted investments in more inclusive education systems, **in support of informal and non-formal education**

2. Gender equality

A. Context

In the EU today, the gender pay gap stands at 16% and the pension gap, culminating point of pay inequalities over the life course, is at 30%. In addition, women still undertake most unpaid work – 79% do housework every day for an hour or more, compared to just 34% of men.¹⁹ These figures illustrate that gender disparities in pay, pension and care responsibilities are particularly strong. Recent literature²⁰ has documented that gender inequalities in earnings and income are closely related to care duties for children, which falls disproportionately on mothers.

B. What we call for

The fact that women take a larger share of essential care work has not sufficiently been considered in the analysis of the gender gaps. The unequal division of care work between genders contributes to continuing gender segregation in education and in the labour market. It has a strong effect of perpetuating women's lower labour force participation over the life course and women's disproportionate participation in precarious employment and reinforces the gender gap in employment, earnings, and pension. The unequal division of care work between genders also hinders the opportunity for mothers to advance in their career and improve their professional skills.

This is the translation of the **motherhood penalty** suffered by women with children. The gender employment, earnings, and pension gaps reflect not only inequalities between men and women but also between mothers and fathers and between women without children and mothers.

C. Recommendations

Make Mothers Matter is convinced that the employment, earnings and pension gaps between men and women cannot be solved without substantive action on *care work*, mostly undertaken by mothers. We strongly believe that gender equality will never be achieved until unpaid care work is **recognised, reduced, and redistributed**.

¹⁸ LifeLong Learning PlatForm., available at <http://llplatform.eu/policy-areas/skills-and-qualifications/validation-of-learning/>.

¹⁹ I. GARCIA., Z. GURMAI., M. NOICHL., AND S. STANISHEV., "The EU Gender Equality Strategy is the beginning of a new chapter", march 6 2020, available at <https://www.euractiv.com/section/all/opinion/the-eu-gender-equality-strategy-is-the-beginning-of-a-new-chapter/>.

²⁰ Alon et al., 2020; EIGE, 2019, *op.cit.*

Ways to **recognise** unpaid care work include:

- Introduce 'care credits' to offset breaks from employment taken to provide informal care to family members and periods of formal care leaves, such as maternity and count those credits towards pension entitlements (*see Principle 15*)
- Recognize & validate the skills acquired while doing unpaid family care work (*see Principle 1*)
- Introduce career breaks entitlement such as the Belgian 'time-credit' system
- Conduct time-use surveys more frequently, with a focus on surveys measuring the allocation of time spent doing care and domestic work. As such, we recommend reviewing EU Regulation on structural statistics on earnings and on labour costs²¹ and to conduct the Structure of earnings survey more frequently and in all EU countries and make HETUS compulsory and more frequent

Ways to **reduce** unpaid care work include:

- Provide high quality childcare centres that are accessible and affordable (*see Principle 11*)
- Support and provide other forms of care possibilities such as community-based childcare services, Gardienne, and childminder (*see Principle 9*)

Ways to **redistribute** unpaid care work include:

- Implement policies that directly encourage fathers to take leave, such as well-compensated individual leave entitlements, but also policies aimed at changing workplace cultures
- Adopt work-life balance measures allowing families to adjust their employment according to the needs of each child, the ages and number of children (*see Principle 9*)
- Implement at national level longer and adequately paid maternal, paternal, and parental leave (*see Principle 9*)
- Extend parental leave to 6 months per parent, remunerated at least as sick pay level or a decent remuneration and make it more flexible to take (*see Principle 9*)
- Revise the maternity leave Directive extending the period of leave to at least 18 paid weeks and with a remuneration at least of sick pay level (*see Principle 9*)

4. Active support to employment

A. Context

Being a parent continues to **hinder women's participation in the labour market**.²² As explained earlier this is due to the disproportionate weight of care duties on mothers. In addition, for mothers coming out of family-related career breaks finding a job in line with their qualifications is very difficult.

Moreover, studies raise serious concerns on the existence of **pregnancy and maternity discrimination** in Europe:

- In Belgium: The Institute for the Equality of Women and Men highlighted in 2017 that 3 out of 4 women workers have faced at least one form of discrimination, prejudice, and tensions at work on the basis of their pregnancy or maternity.²³

²¹ Council Regulation (CE) 530/1999 of 9 march 1999 on structural statistics on earnings and on labour costs, *J.O.U.E.*, L 63/6, 1999.

²² EIGE., Index 2019., *op.cit.* p. 33.

²³ Institut pour l'égalité des femmes et des hommes., " Grossesse ", 2017, available at <https://igvm.iefh.belgium.be/fr/activites/discrimination/grossesse>.

- In France; the High Authority for the Fight against Discrimination and for Equality (HALDE) recorded 615 cases of pregnancy and maternity discrimination. According to the HALDE, discrimination based on pregnancy, sex, and maternity affected 12 % of female workers in 2010.²⁴
- In the Netherlands; a study was conducted over a four-year period on 1000 pregnant women who were either job seekers or employees. 45% of the women interviewed explained that they faced discrimination related to their pregnancy and maternity.²⁵
- In the UK in 2016, a study found that 77% of pregnant women and new mothers experience some form of discrimination at work.²⁶

B. What we call for

Mothers coming out of family-related career breaks face significant challenges in finding a job in line with their qualifications. **Easier access to lifelong learning for women**, providing qualifications after career breaks, and **targeted support for mothers for job search, training and re-skilling** is crucial. In addition, **work-life balance policies and affordable and flexible early childhood education and care** are needed as they are key enabler for mothers' participation in the labour market. *MMM* also calls for a firm commitment to tackling pregnancy discrimination.

C. Recommendations

- Provide targeted support for mothers for job search, training, and reskilling
- Undertake awareness campaigns which brings employers, unions, and voluntary organisations together to address pregnancy and maternity-related discrimination and support women's participation in the workforce during their childbearing years.
- Work with employers to encourage them to evaluate the retention rates for women one year after returning to work following maternity leave as part of their gender pay gap analysis
- Support women to challenge pregnancy discrimination by building women's knowledge of their rights

9. Work-life balance

When asked about how to balance their work and family life, mothers say they **want to be present on the labour market AND spend time educating their children, giving priority to one or another depending on the ages and number of children.**²⁷ This is why *MMM* supports a **life-cycle** approach, rather than a linear one, allowing women and men to leave the labour market partially or completely for a definite period of time to care for and educate their children, and then re-enter it.

As highlighted by EIGE there are strong links between gender equality and work-life balance. Factors such as leave policies, the availability of care services, flexible working arrangements and the overall child-friendliness of society, condition the way men and women establish their decisions regarding both work and family²⁸.

²⁴ ILO., " Kit de ressources sur la maternité ; Module 9 Protection de l'emploi et non-discrimination ", 2012, available at http://mprp.itcilo.org/allegati/fr/m9_FR.pdf.

²⁵ Nederlands Juristen Comité voor de Mensenrechten., "La discrimination fondée sur la grossesse et la maternité ne diminue pas aux Pays-Bas ", 2016 available at <https://www.liberties.eu/fr/news/pregnancy-discrimination-research-netherlands/9850>.

²⁶ Alliance For Maternity Rights., " Action Plan : Putting an end to pregnancy discrimination in the workplace ", 2016, available at <https://maternityaction.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/AfMRAActionPlanFINALOct2016-1.pdf>.

²⁷ Results of our survey carried out with 12000 mothers in Europe. Make Mothers Matter, " What Matters to Mothers in Europe ", 2011, available at <https://makemothersmatter.org/delegations/europe/what-matters-to-mothers-in-europe>,

²⁸ EIGE., Index 2019., *op.cit.* p. 122.

This section will cover:

- I. Maternity leave policies
- II. Paternity and parental leave policies
- III. Childcare services and informal care of children
- IV. Flexible working arrangements
- V. Work-Life balance conceptualisation

I. Maternity leave policies

A. Context

Under the EU Maternity Leave Directive (92/85/EEC), women have the right to a minimum of 14 weeks (3 months) of maternity leave. Although this Directive serves as guidance for member states, there are still considerable differences in the way that maternity leave policy is structured across EU countries. This variation can be differentiated across five areas: duration of leave, whether it is mandatory or not, degree of compensation, the agency in charge of providing it, and the level of flexibility allowed in the mode of uptake.²⁹

B. What we call for

Maternity leave is intended to safeguard the health of the mother and her child during the perinatal period. This is critical to health considering the physiological demands associated with pregnancy and childbirth. Studies show that longer maternity leaves are associated with fewer premature births, less depression among mothers and with lower perinatal, infant and child mortality. Longer maternity leaves are also associated with longer durations of breastfeeding, which in turn improve child health and development outcomes.³⁰ For these reasons, *MMM* calls for an extension of the duration of the maternity leave in the European Union.

C. Recommendations

MMM calls for the revision of the maternity leave Directive **extending the period of leave to at least 18 paid weeks with a remuneration at least of sick pay level.**

II. Paternity and parental leave policies

A. Context

The Directive on work life-balance for parents and carers introduced at least 10 working days of paid paternity leave and proposed an additional incentive (paid non-transferable parental leave of 2 out of 4 months to encourage greater take-up by fathers).³¹

However, today, take-up of parental leave by fathers remains a challenge and the lion's share of parental leave is taken by women in all MS.³²

²⁹ Rand Europe, "Maternity leave policies Trade-offs between labour market demands and health benefits for children", 2016.

³⁰ ILO., "Maternity Protection Ressource Package: Module 3 Maternity Protection at work : why is it important? ", 2012.

³¹ EIGE., Index 2019., *op.cit.* p. 71.

³² EIGE., *ibid.*

B. What we call for

It is essential that fathers are involved from the start in childcare. “If childcare is no longer considered the sole domain of women and more fathers take parental leave to stay at home and look after their children in their first year, the outcomes for gender equality include increased women’s labour-market participation, reduced gender pay gaps and increased men’s participation in household work”.³³ However, several factors affect the uptake of leave by fathers. These include the level of compensation, the availability of affordable childcare, the flexibility of leave arrangements, gender norms and cultural expectations.³⁴

C. Recommendations

Low or non-existent compensation level during leave are a key factor of why fathers are not able to take their leave entitlement. To increase their uptake, “an interlocking set of family policies that help dual-earner families to combine work and family life in a sustainable manner” is needed. This “includes **policies that directly encourage fathers to take leave, such as well-compensated individual leave entitlements, and policies aimed at creating a sustainable solution to the challenges of combining work and family life,** such as leave arrangements that are flexible and adaptive to individual needs, but also **policies aimed at changing workplace cultures.**”³⁵

III. Childcare services and informal care of children

To reduce the gender gaps in employment, income, and pension, it is essential to redistribute care between men and women and between families and society. As such, **it is crucial to provide accessible, affordable, quality childcare services until mandatory school age.** However, **current discussions on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) do not consider the importance of care provided by mothers and fathers.**

By surveying over 12.000 mothers in Europe³⁶ it became clear to us that **mothers want to have an economically feasible choice between an outsourced or an in-family care solution** (enabling them to take care of their under school-age children themselves).

As we will see in *Principle 11 “Childcare and support to children”*, parents should have a real choice between *formal, informal, semi-formal childcare solutions* or caring for their under school-age children themselves.

IV. Flexible working arrangements

A. Context

A fifth of Europeans are dissatisfied with the balance between their work and personal lives. According to EIGE, 57% of women and 54% of men are unable to change their work schedule.³⁷ Most mothers in Europe prefer to remain in the labour market but to also have time to devote to their families, especially when their children are young³⁸. Flexible working arrangements are crucial to achieving this.

³³ EIGE., *ibid.*

³⁴ Rand Europe., “Paternity and parental leave policies across the European Union”, 2016, p.3.

³⁵ Rand Europe., *ibid.*

³⁶ Make Mothers Matter, “What Matters to Mothers in Europe”, *op.cit.*

³⁷ EIGE., Index 2019., *op.cit.* p. 102.

³⁸ Make Mothers Matter, “What Matters to Mothers in Europe”, *op.cit.*

B. What we call for

We call for measures that allow a flexible working arrangement for parents.

C. Recommendations

The work-life balance Directive provides the right to request flexible working conditions for parents of children until 12 years old and people with caring responsibilities. However, *MMM* would like to see **these rights extended to parents of children until 18 years old.**

In addition, *MMM* would also like that the **situation of the self-employed** (close to 33 million workers or 14% of the working population in Europe) to be taken into account so that these workers can benefit from an EU framework on family leave schemes.

Lastly, *MMM* supports initiatives and measures adopted by companies to help employees better reconcile work and family life as part of their CSR policies. Two good practices are worth highlighting:

- The EFR certificate from Spain, provides an audit of internal policies which have an impact on work-life balance promoted by our member *Más Familia Foundation*³⁹, and supported by the Spanish Ministry of Health and Social Policy. It has already helped over 600 organisations to implement a new work culture with work-life balance at its core.
- In 2020, Nestlé introduced the new "More inclusive and enhanced global parental support policy"⁴⁰, which sets minimum standards of 18 weeks parental leave for primary caregivers and 4 weeks for secondary caregivers.

V. Work-Life balance conceptualisation

For more effective policies on work-life balance, **the discourse of work-life balance needs to be broadened and should welcome more areas such as lifelong learning into discussions and policies.**⁴¹

Work-life balance goes beyond negotiations in the professional sphere, it is a negotiation between members of families, in which inequalities are often rooted. Even if we have effective work-life balance policies, **if men do not take up more caring responsibilities inside the home and women are expected to carry the double responsibility of home and work, gender inequalities will persist.**

Lastly, **work-life balance should radically be redefined**, so that parents, employers, and society will stop seeing their time off work spent with their children as conflicting with their careers. **Maternity leave** and **parental care** are **learning experiences** that provide parents with **soft skills** that contribute to **social inclusion, personal development, empowerment, and professional development.**

11. Childcare and support to children

I. Childcare services

³⁹ MásFamilia organisation., at <https://www.masfamilia.org>.

⁴⁰ NESTLÉ., "Nestlé supports families with new parental leave policy", 2019, available at <https://www.nestle.com/media/pressreleases/allpressreleases/nestle-supports-families-new-parental-leave-policy>.

⁴¹ EIGE., Index 2019., *op.cit.* p. 122.

A. Context

Usually, the different forms of early childhood care and education are categorised as such:

- *formal* (state provided crèche, kindergarten, nursery)
- *informal* (grandparents, relatives, babysitters, au-pairs)
- *semi-formal* (accredited, licenced Tagesmutter, Gardienne, childminder)⁴²

To reduce the gender gaps in employment, incomes, and pension, it is essential to redistribute care between men and women and between families and all parts of society. As such, **it is crucial to provide accessible, affordable, quality childcare services until mandatory school age.**

However, current discussions on early childhood education and care do not consider the importance of care provided by mothers and fathers. By surveying over 12.000 mothers in Europe⁴³ it became clear to us that **mothers want to have an economically feasible choice between an outsourced or an in-family care solution** (enabling them to take care of their under school-age children themselves).

Families are at the center of nurturing care for young children. Parents have the capacity to address children's needs and support positive socio-emotional development. To provide it, they need information, resources, and services.⁴⁴

B. What we call for

Parents should have a real choice between *formal, informal, semi-formal* childcare solutions or caring for their under school-age children themselves.

For this choice to be free there needs to be:

- Accessible, affordable, and quality childcare services until mandatory school age.

However, according to Eurostat⁴⁵, the main obstacle to the use of childcare is the cost it represents for families. This discourages parents, in particular mothers from working. Some Member States have taken steps to reduce this cost. For example, Malta provides free childcare for children whose parents work or are in education. Ireland offers parents free childcare services on a part-time basis. This so-called "Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme" provides parents with 15 hours of free centralised private childcare services per week.⁴⁶

- More attention given to the choices of parents regarding outsourced or an in-family care solution.

Parents who would like to care for their under school-age children themselves should be able to do so without fear of repercussion on their income, pension, and ability to return to work. This was highlighted by one of our members, *Le Petit Vélo Jaune*⁴⁷, who insisted on the fact that more attention should be given to parents' choices on outsourced or an in-family care solution.

⁴² COFACE., " Policy position : Early Childhood Care and Education, 2014, available at <http://www.coface-eu.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/2014-COFACE-position-ECCE-EN.pdf>.

⁴³ Make Mothers Matter, "What Matters to Mothers in Europe", *op.cit.*

⁴⁴WHO, UN Children's Fund, WORLD BANK GROUP, "Nurturing care for early childhood development: a framework for helping children survive and thrive to transform health and human potential", 2018, p.26.

⁴⁵ EUROPEAN COMMISSION, " Barcelona objectives", 2018, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/bcn_objectives-report2018_web_en.pdf

⁴⁶ EUROPEAN COMMISSION, *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Le Petit Vélo Jaune* offers support to parents who in precarious situation, <https://www.petitvelojaune.be/>

The Finnish model of ECEC is an example worth highlighting as it is based on a set of policies that consider the choices of parents regarding outsourced or an in-family care solution. In this model, “all children under school-age are entitled to early childhood education and care **should** their parents so decide.”⁴⁸ After the parental leave period parents have several options to choose from:

- Municipal ECEC services
- Private ECEC services or childcare with the private childcare allowance
- Staying at home on care leave and child home care allowance until the youngest child turns three⁴⁹

Caring for children until they turn three therefore becomes economically possible for parents who choose this option. For those who choose not to, ECEC services are made accessible and affordable. This model falls within what *MMM* has been supporting: **a real choice for parents, giving them an economically feasible option between an outsourced or an in-family care solution**. However, when child home care allowances are put in place, fathers should be encouraged to take them as to not reinforce existing stereotypes and gender gaps (employment, pay, pension).

MMM also calls for **career breaks entitlement** such as the Belgian ‘time-credit system’⁵⁰ which allows employees – under certain conditions – to take a career break – in whole or in part – for a certain period of time, during which parents receive an allowance.

Lastly, policies should support parents that make the choice of **informal care** or **semi formal care**. This includes community-based carers, *Leihomas* (“borrow” a grandmother⁵¹), intergenerational activities such as the *Play Hubs*⁵²(the later ones have been recognised as good practice that should be replicated in other European countries).⁵³

The recent report *Leave No Child Behind*⁵⁴ states that High-quality ECD (early childhood development) programmes should be inclusive, child-centred, family-focused, play-based, community-based and integrated with other services. Systems that are embedded in communities have proven to provide positive and sustainable results to achieve social inclusion and eradicate poverty.

C. Recommendations

- Foster flexible solutions that **give parents a real choice** between *formal, informal, semi-formal* childcare solutions or caring for their under school-age children themselves
- Provide **accessible, affordable and of a quality childcare** services until mandatory school age
- Introduce **career breaks entitlement** such as the Belgian ‘time-credit system’
- Introduce, ‘**care credits**’ to offset breaks from employment taken to provide informal care to family members and periods of formal care leaves.
- Support and provide **other forms of childcare** (community-based childcare services, Gardienne, childminder, e.g)

⁴⁸ See [European Commission’s Eurydice network page on Finland](#)

⁴⁹ If a child under the age of three does not attend municipal day care, the family can claim **child home care allowance**. This allowance is flexible as parents can choose to reduce their working time to 30 hours or less and claim a flexible care allowance.

⁵⁰ See <https://www.paterna-professional.be/en/knowledge-center/infoflashes/time-credit-and-additional-hours>

⁵¹ See <https://kinderschutzbund-bochum.de/2020/09/11/einblick-in-den-grosselterndienst/>

⁵² See <http://www.toyproject.net/project/toy-inclusion-2/>

⁵³ As announced by Géraldine Libreau -Policy Officer – ECEC at European Commission: The Toy for inclusion and the concept of play hubs will be promoted in the European Commission Toolkit for inclusion in ECEC, to be published early 2021.

⁵⁴ Light for the World and Open Society Foundation, Global Report “Leave No Child Behind”, 2020, p.23., available at :https://www.light-for-the-world.org/sites/lfdw_org/files/download_files/global_summative_report_leave_no_child_behind.pdf,

II. Support to children

A. Context

Children of single-parent families are among the most vulnerable social groups in society. Research shows that single motherhood is linked to poor health, stress, joblessness, problems in coping with work-life balance, poverty, homelessness, social exclusion, etc. As “women tend to be mainly responsible for the purchase of basic goods and are key for the sustenance of the household”⁵⁵, their precarity directly impacts their family.

B. What we call for

As partners to the Investing in Children Alliance⁵⁶, we call for the incorporation of parents’ access to resources under each service area of the Child Guarantee Recommendation.

We also call to **consult** and **work** with parents to ensure they are part of the process as their role is key for the well-being of their children. As our partners in the Alliance stated: “this wellbeing depends in large part on the support to the parents (and beyond income support)”⁵⁷.

C. Recommendations

As mentioned in the joint statement⁵⁸ of the *EU Alliance for Investing in Children*, we recommend:

- The development of **national Child Guarantee action plans** according to the challenges and priorities of MS in tackling child poverty and social exclusion, identify groups of children in vulnerable situation and, describe what kind of policies and EU and national investments will be put in place to support them
- MS to commit to **implement the Child Guarantee in a rights-based approach** always taking into consideration the best interest of the child, recognising children as independent rights holders whilst fully acknowledging the importance of supporting families as primary carers
- Ensure that **EU funds** are used **strategically** and **in line with the Child Guarantee Action Plans** and multiannual strategies
- **Setting up a monitoring and reporting framework for the Child Guarantee** multiannual strategies and National Action Plans
- Ensure their **alignment with national antipoverty strategies and the Sustainable Development Goals**, setting targets for reducing child poverty.
- The **inclusion of the civil society** as a key actor in the implementation of the Child Guarantee

15. Old age income and pensions

A. Context

The European population is ageing. In 2019, more than a fifth of the EU population was aged 65 and over. The share of older persons in the total population will increase significantly in the coming

⁵⁵ FEMM Committee, Opinion on reducing inequalities with a special focus on in-work poverty, 2019/2188(INI), 25 August 2020.

⁵⁶ EU Alliance for Investing in Children., <http://www.alliance4investinginchildren.eu/partners/>.

⁵⁷ ATD Fourth World., <https://www.atd-quartmonde.org>.

⁵⁸ EU Alliance for Investing in Children., “ Contribution of the UE Alliance for investing in Children to the European Commission Public Consultation on the Child Guarantee ”, october 06 2020, available at <http://www.alliance4investinginchildren.eu/contribution-of-the-eu-alliance-for-investing-in-children-to-the-european-commission-public-consultation-on-the-child-guarantee/>.

decades⁵⁹, and with that so will the need for care. Yet, about 80% of the time spent caring for people with a disability or for the elderly is provided by informal carers: family, friends, or neighbours. This duty mostly falls on women.

As highlighted by M. VOTHKNECHT (DG EMPL)⁶⁰, gender gaps in pensions reflect the gender gaps in remuneration, working hours and years of employment of women. Household and caring duties relating to children and older relatives fall mostly upon women who, as a result, experience more career interruptions and hold part-time jobs more often than men.

In 2017 the gender pension gap (GGP) – the gap between the average pre-tax income received as a pension by women and that received by men – stood at 37,5%⁶¹ in the 65 and over age group. The GGP is almost never simply a question of pension system design. Its explanation is unlikely to just point to any one specific feature or parameter of the pension system. **Typically pension systems cumulate inequalities that occur over a person’s lifetime.**

In 2016, the FEMM Committee stated that⁶² **“the pension gap...reflects the higher proportion of women working part-time, for lower hourly wages, with career breaks and with less years in employment owing to the unpaid work performed by women as mothers and as caregivers in their families.”** The report also highlights that the GGP of married women and mothers is much greater than that of single women without children and that inequalities suffered by mothers, especially single mothers, are likely to be exacerbated when they retire.

Without recognition, informal carers and families are exposed to a higher risk of poverty, having to reduce or drop out of labour market with direct consequences on their income.

B. What we call for

In our survey *What Matters to Mothers in Europe*⁶³, respondent **mothers said they wanted better recognition of the importance of family care and motherhood in society.** They asked **for the unpaid care work done by families to be recognised as a major resource for society and as a source of social cohesion.** By caring for and raising their children, mothers are working for the future of our society. It is high time this invisible work, mostly done by women/mothers, is recognized, and valued for what it is: **essential work. Unpaid care work is an indispensable support to the world economy.** Yet it is not recognized, not valued, and generates poverty and discrimination.

As such, *MMM* calls on Member States to introduce **“care credits”** to the benefit of both women and men and to fairly take these credits into account in pension entitlements. These “care credits” will offset breaks from employment to provide informal care to family members, and periods of formal care leave, such as maternity, paternity, and parental leave. Theoretically, these periods should be credited to a carer’s pension contribution, irrespective of whether the care is provided to underage children, elderly persons, or sick or disabled persons.

C. Recommendations

- Redefining **“work”** as a holistic concept combining **both paid and unpaid work**

⁵⁹ See: <http://www.alliance4investinginchildren.eu/contribution-of-the-eu-alliance-for-investing-in-children-to-the-european-commission-public-consultation-on-the-child-guarantee/>.

⁶⁰ European Commission., “What explains the higher poverty risk of elderly women? ”, 2015, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=752&furtherNews=yes&newsId=2349>.

⁶¹ EUROPEAN COMMISSION, *Ibid.*

⁶² FEMM Committee, Report on the need for EU strategy to end prevent the gender pension gap, A8-0197/2017, 12 May 2017.

⁶³ Make Mothers Matter, “What Matters to Mothers in Europe”, *op.cit.*

- Considering **unpaid care work as essential work** giving access to social rights, (e.g., access to social security, education, and training)
- Introducing '**care credits**' to offset breaks from employment taken in order to provide informal care to family members and periods of formal care leave, such as maternity, paternity and parental leave, and to count those credits towards pension entitlements fairly
- Promoting **time-credit**⁶⁴ which allows parents to take a career break for a certain period, during which they receive an allowance
- For those who have stopped working to be a carer during a long period, re-access to the labour market is extremely complicated. Therefore, recognition of this work should also mean **recognition of skills** (see Principle 1) and give the possibility of **training for future employment** (see Principle 4)
- Reform Member States systems for **survivor's pensions and widow's pensions** in order not to penalise unmarried women and study the effects of different systems providing survivor's pensions in light of the high rates of divorce, the incidence of poverty among non-married couples and the social exclusion of older women⁶⁵

19. Housing and assistance for the homeless

A. Context

The risk of poverty and social exclusion is particularly high among the most vulnerable groups in society. These include mothers (especially single mothers), refugee and migrant women and women with disabilities. Other intersectional risk factors such as unemployment, lack of care services for children and caring responsibilities for dependent family members, make mothers and women with caring responsibilities more vulnerable to poverty risks.⁶⁶

Women are more at risk of poverty and social exclusion than men (22.8 % of women compared to 20, 8 of men 2018)⁶⁷. COVID-19 has aggravated this situation, affecting everyone - but not equally so. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by the economic effects of global pandemics, especially those in the poorest and most marginalized communities. As highlighted by the *European Anti-Poverty Network*⁶⁸, "millions of women lived in poverty, at the verge of the precipice, and suddenly the COVID-19 outbreak threw them over it". As a result, women face an increased risk of homelessness and/or more difficulties in accessing housing. This is due to expensive private rental, difficult access to affordable housing (increasingly scarce in many cities), discrimination and higher risk of eviction. This problematic is experienced by organisations which help give a roof to the most vulnerable, such as our member organisation *Les 3 Pommiers*⁶⁹, which is reporting a worsening of the conditions to find affordable housing.

Due to the pandemic, single parent families are at higher risk than ever.⁷⁰ As such, many countries, such as Belgium and Finland, consider that the current COVID-19 crisis is hitting single mothers and their children hard.⁷¹

B. What we call for

⁶⁴ See example of Belgian 'time-credit system' on p.11.

⁶⁵ FEMM Committee, Report on the need for an EU strategy to end and prevent the gender pension gap, *op.cit.*

⁶⁶ FEMM Committee, Opinion on reducing inequalities with a special focus on in-work poverty, *op.cit.*

⁶⁷ Eurostat, data visualisation on 'At risk of poverty and social exclusion', 2018, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/EDN-20191017-1?inheritRedirect=true&>

⁶⁸ European anti-poverty Network, "The impact of COVID-19 on people experiencing poverty and vulnerability", 2020, p.48.

⁶⁹ *Les Trois Pommiers* is Belgian non-profit organisation which accommodates people in vulnerable situations, www.lestroispommiers.be.

⁷⁰ European anti-poverty Network, *Ibid.*

⁷¹ European anti-poverty Network, *Ibid.*

In a joint statement⁷² on 12 November 2020, MMM called on the **European Commission** to respond to the Council Conclusions of October 2020, on “*Strengthening Minimum Income Protection to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion in the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond*”⁷³, by making an ambitious proposal for an **EU Framework Directive to guarantee an adequate, accessible, and enabling Minimum Income**.

We believe that an adequate guaranteed minimum income is a social and human right for all people and helps to guarantee a minimum standard of living and a decent life for all, enabling people to fully participate in society. One of the best ways to prevent people from being dragged into poverty is to build individual and societal resilience – and **strong social protection systems** are the cornerstone of such resilience. In this context, **adequate, accessible, and enabling Minimum Income schemes** have an essential role to play as an ultimate safety net.

In addition, ECEC is an important tool to facilitate the employment of single parents.⁷⁴ ECD programs and services must be understood as investments and prioritized in the global pandemic response and recovery (see *Principle 9*).

Countries that combine universal and policy measures targeting single parents show lower poverty rates among single parents.⁷⁵ MMM therefore calls on policy measures tailored specifically to single parents. These include child support (and guaranteed advances) and financial supplements to child benefits that are targeted to single parents in poverty.

Lastly, we endorse the Housing campaign launched the Green Party of the EU Parliament (EFA), calling on the Commission and the Member States to make housing one of the cornerstones of the action plan on the EPSR.⁷⁶

C. Recommendations

- Respond to the Council Conclusions by making an ambitious proposal for an EU Framework Directive to **guarantee an adequate, accessible, and enabling Minimum Income**
- Provide **policy tailored specifically to single parents**. This include child support (and guaranteed advances) and financial supplements to child benefits that are targeted to single parents in poverty
- Foster flexible solutions that **give parents a real choice between formal, informal, or semi formal childhood care and education**
- Provide **accessible, affordable, and quality childcare** services until mandatory school age
- Implement employment policies providing for better jobs, not necessarily for more jobs⁷⁷
- Improve **monitoring** of the situation of **single parents** in the EU ⁷⁸

⁷² Available at: <https://makemothersmatter.org/joint-statement-for-a-framework-directive-on-minimum-incom/>

⁷³ Council of the EU, Conclusions on “Strengthening Minimum Income Protection to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion in the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond”, 9th October 2020, available at: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-11721-2020-INIT/en/pdf>

⁷⁴ Study requested by the FEMM committee, “The situation of single parents in the EU, November 2020, available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/659870/IPOL_STU\(2020\)659870_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/659870/IPOL_STU(2020)659870_EN.pdf)

⁷⁵ Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs, and Inclusion *Peer Review on “Single mothers facing poverty: Providing adequate financial, material and social support for sustainable social integration”*, Belgium, 5 & 6 October 2017.

⁷⁶ European Parliament, Draft report on access to decent and affordable housing for all, 2019, available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/EMPL-PR-653984_EN.pdf

⁷⁷ Study requested by the FEMM Committee, “The situation of single parents in the EU”, 2020, p.78, available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/659870/IPOL_STU\(2020\)659870_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/659870/IPOL_STU(2020)659870_EN.pdf)

⁷⁸ FEMM Committee, *Ibid*.

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