



## High Level Political Forum

6-15 July 2021

"Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development".

### Concept Note for a Side-Event

## Changing narratives about Unpaid Care work and the Economy

14 July 2021 – 07:30-9:00 am New York / 1:30-3:00 pm Paris  
Side-Event to be held virtually during the HLPF

*"COVID-19 has been likened to an x-ray, revealing fractures in the fragile skeleton of the societies we have built. It is exposing fallacies and falsehoods everywhere: the lie that free markets can deliver healthcare for all; the fiction that unpaid care work is not work; the delusion that we live in a post-racist world; the myth that we are all in the same boat. Because while we are all floating on the same sea, it's clear that some are in super-yachts while others are clinging to drifting debris... Inequality defines our time."*

Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary General, 2020 Nelson Mandela Lecture<sup>1</sup>

The proposed HLPF side-event relates to 3 of the 9 SDGs that will be reviewed in 2021, namely SDG 1, SDG 8 and SDG 10.

Changing narratives about unpaid care work, in particular a mothers' work, and the economy is also in our view key to bring about the systemic changes which are so necessary to ensure a sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and to achieve the 2020 development agenda.

This side-event will continue and build on the conversation initiated at our 2020 HLPF side-event on "Care and Education – Cornerstones of sustainable and just economies"<sup>2</sup>.

### Background

The Covid-19 crisis has shown what really matters to people. It has highlighted in particular the critical importance of Care work, whether paid or unpaid. It also increased visibility of the people carrying out this invaluable work, most of whom are women.

This crisis also exposed the challenges that most women, especially when they are mothers, face in trying to juggle paid work and Care responsibilities, as these dramatically increased with lockdowns and schools moving online – even forcing many mothers out of the workforce.

Feminist economists have long shown that, in fact, our current economic system doesn't really work for women, particularly not for mothers, and they have also for many years pointed to the inequitable distribution of unpaid care work as a root cause of Gender inequalities and discriminations, especially when it comes to mothers' labour force participation<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nelsonmandela.org/news/entry/annual-lecture-2020-secretary-general-guterres-full-speech>

<sup>2</sup> See <https://makemothersmatter.org/placing-care-education-at-the-heart-of-a-new-economic-system/>

<sup>3</sup> See for example the work of the Women's Budget Group, UK <sup>3</sup> <https://wbg.org.uk/commission/>

And indeed, the Covid-19 crisis has also exposed how our economic system and thinking is based on wrong assumptions and falsehoods, in particular, as pointed out by the UN Secretary General, the “fiction that unpaid care work is not work”, and “the lie that free markets can deliver health” and wellbeing for all.

The reality is that our current economic system considers both unpaid care work and nature as endless and free commodities. It is at the root of the many global crises that our world faces today, from increasing inequalities to climate change and environmental destruction.

**The Covid-19 crisis provides a unique opportunity to repurpose our economy, to a more caring system that serves the wellbeing of people and our planet, not the other way around. And bringing about such systemic changes begins by changing narratives.**

### *Changing the narratives on unpaid care work, in families and workplaces*

Unpaid care work is an indispensable component of human wellbeing. Yet unpaid care work IS work; and it is work that develops skills which can benefit companies.

Changing the narrative on unpaid care work begins in families, by sharing the care more equitably between fathers and mothers. When men are more involved in care work, they see its value and its importance, and this new perspective can spread in communities and society. In turn, sharing the care not only benefits every family member, but also fosters gender equality, and a more caring and peaceful society<sup>4</sup>.

The private sector must also change its perspective and take responsibility by embracing a more holistic approach to work, where both paid and unpaid care work are combined and can nurture each other. Supporting workers with caregiving responsibilities, mothers in particular, is a long-term investment – with returns. And recognizing and further developing the skills involved in caring benefits both employers and employees<sup>5</sup>.

### *Changing the narratives on the economy*

We designed our current economic system and we can change it. We can transform our economy so that it first serves the wellbeing of people and ensures the sustainability of life on our planet.

The consensus is growing about the inadequacy of our current economic system to address our multiple crises and achieve the 2030 development agenda<sup>6</sup>. From the Doughnuts economics to a human rights-based approach to the wellbeing economy, different narratives have been proposed which all have the same purpose: moving away from short-termism and GDP growth as the sole driver of our economies, and repurposing the whole system so that it serves people and nature – not the other way around.

## **Objectives of the Side-Event**

The main purpose of this side-event, which will take the form of a panel, is to put forward different narratives and perspectives on unpaid family care work and the economy and to pose the vital question: how do we go about creating this change in narrative and ensure governments and international organisations take action in favour of this change?

<sup>4</sup> See Promundo’s State of the World’s Fathers reports series: <https://promundoglobal.org/programs/state-of-the-worlds-fathers/>

<sup>5</sup> See for example: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ashoka/2021/05/09/caring-is-our-super-power-lets-lead-with-it/>

<sup>6</sup> See <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/01/5-reasons-why-the-economy-is-failing-the-environment-and-humanity/> or the 2020 UNDP’s Human Development report “The Next Frontier - Human Development and the Anthropocene” <http://report.hdr.undp.org/intro.html>

Our objectives are:

- To raise awareness on the importance and the multiple benefits of taking a more holistic approach to “work”, that combines both paid and unpaid care work, and recognize unpaid care work as (1) indispensable and precious work for our society, (2) a work experience that develops valuable skills, and (3) an essential pillar of our economy
- To make the case for a paradigm shift in our economic narrative and thinking around Care, so that in budgets, spending in care, health and education as well as family support, are considered as investments - not as mere expenses
- To showcase examples of good policies and practices that can change the perspectives and views on both unpaid family care work and our economy
- To call on governments and international organisations to action: the Covid-19 crisis and its subsequent economic and human devastation provide a unique opportunity to transform our economy: by switching from the short-term and exploitative “GDP growth” narrative to the wellbeing economy narrative

### Modality and provisional list of speakers

There will be a short introduction from the moderator and an introductory video with testimonials from grassroots organisations among MMM members, working for change. There will then follow presentations by expert panellists, which will form the basis for subsequent discussion and questions from the floor.

Introduction

- **Anne-Claire de Liedekerke, President, Make Mothers Matter**
- **Olivier de Schutter, UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights**

Moderator:

- **Susan Himmelweit, Feminist economist**, Emeritus professor of economics for the Open University in the UK, member of the UK Women’s Budget Group Commission for a Gender Equal Economy<sup>7</sup>

Panellists:

*Changing the narrative on unpaid family care work in families and workplaces*

- **Gary Barker, Founder and CEO, Promundo Global** – on the importance of sharing the care between within families, not only for redistribution purposes, but also as a way to changing the view that men have on the value of this work, and the potential multiplier effect it can have on the wellbeing of every family member, gender equality, and a more caring society
- **Sonia Malaspina, Sonia Malaspina, Director, Human Resources South Europe, Danone Specialized Nutrition**<sup>8</sup> – to show how supporting workers with caregiving responsibilities, especially mothers, can, in the long term, be a win-win strategy for private companies and employees alike, and contribute to

<sup>7</sup> <https://wbg.org.uk/commission/>

<sup>8</sup> On what Danone SN Italy does to empower mothers and other employees with caring responsibilities, see for example: <https://www.empowerwomen.org/en/community/stories/2020/01/leading-the-way-for-employer-supported-childcare-solutions> -

see also Sonia Malaspina’s TEDx talk on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I7kiE2SjxkA>

shifting perspectives on unpaid care work as being interrelated with paid work, as it develops skills which are also of value for a company

*Changing the narrative on the economy, to empower mothers and children*

- **Anam Parvez, Gender Justice Research Lead and Policy Advisor, Oxfam Great Britain**, on “Time to care” & reframing care as a ‘social good’ to bring about human economies caring for people<sup>9</sup>
- **Shahra Razavi, Director, ILO Social Protection Department** – on changing the narrative on social protection so that it is considered as an investment, not an expense to be minimized, and is designed to support unpaid caregiving<sup>10</sup>

This event will be organized by Make Mothers Matter as a Zoom webinar.

There will be interpretation in French.

### About Make Mother Matter - MMM

Make Mothers Matter believes in the power of mothers to make the world a better place, advocating for their recognition and support as changemakers. Created in 1947, MMM is an international NGO with no political or religious affiliations, transparently voicing the concerns of mothers at the highest level: the European Union, UNESCO and the United Nations (general consultative status). MMM also federates a network of about 40 grassroots organisations working in about 30 countries across the world to support and empower mothers and their families, and to advance the human rights of women and children.

More information on [www.makemothersmatter.org](http://www.makemothersmatter.org)

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<sup>9</sup> See Oxfam 2020 and 2021 Reports: *Time to Care* (<https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/time-care>) & Public good or private wealth - Universal health, education and other public services reduce the gap between rich and poor, and between women and men. Fairer taxation of the wealthiest can help pay for them (<https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620599/bp-public-good-or-private-wealth-210119-en.pdf>)

<sup>10</sup> See ILO’s website page on social protection <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/social-security/lang--en/index.htm> & 2018 Report *Care work and care jobs for the future of work* [https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS\\_633135/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_633135/lang--en/index.htm) - See also UN Women’s Progress of the world’s women 2015–2016 report *Transforming Economies, Realizing Rights* <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/4/progress-of-the-worlds-women-2015>