



Make
Mothers
Matter

UN Commission on Social Development

61st Session – 6-15 February 2023

Priority theme: Creating full and productive employment and decent work for all as a way of overcoming inequalities to accelerate the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Concept Note for a (virtual) Side-Event

Leave no single mother behind

On 15 February – 9:45-11:00 EST / 15:45-17:00 CET

Decent work plays a key role in achieving poverty reduction and gender equality. With this event, MMM would like to draw attention to the **specificity of the situation of single parents**, in particular single mothers, and **the challenges they face to access decent work**. The event will also draw upon the experience of grassroots organisations to propose solutions to lift single mothers out of poverty and exclusion, and call on governments to act.

Background information

Make Mothers Matter has long highlighted the inequitable distribution of unpaid family care work and how it prevents women, in particular when they are mothers, to access decent work and fully participate in the labour market, an issue which came under the spotlight during the Covid-19 crisis.

The situation is exacerbated for parents who raise their children alone, who are mostly mothers. Indeed, a single mother does not have much choice: she has to assume full responsibility for both the unpaid work of running the house and raising children, and the necessary paid work to bring an income into the home.

A few facts and figures on the growing phenomena of single-motherhood

Single-motherhood can have many causes, but in the vast majority of cases it is not a choice. Reasons for single-motherhood include:

- Non-recognition of the child's birth by the father
- Abandonment of the home by the father after birth
- Divorce
- Widowhood
- Separation because of migration or refugee status
- Personal choice.

A few figures:

- Globally nearly 8% of all households are headed by a single parent and 84% of single-parent households are headed by mothers¹.

¹ Progress of the world's women report 2019-2020: Families in a changing world, UN Women - <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/progress-of-the-worlds-women>

- In absolute numbers, this represents **101.3 million single mothers, i.e. mothers living alone with their children. However, an important diversity exists in their living arrangements: many do not live alone with their children but instead live in extended households, which means that they are not counted – and mostly invisible to policy makers²**
- Single parenthood has been increasing over the past decades, and it concerns both developed and developing countries, albeit for different reasons. Single parent household's share ranges from 6% in Eastern & South-Eastern Asia and Central & Southern Asia, to 11% in Latin America & the Caribbean³
- About 3.4% of single mothers are under the age of 25 which makes them particularly vulnerable

Single mothers face multiple challenge in accessing decent work

What are the specific challenges faced by single mothers?

- The impossibility of sharing domestic tasks and the unpaid work of caring for and educating their children with a partner – and therefore the need to reduce working hours to accommodate childcare and schooling
- A lack of quality childcare facilities for young children, and/or their cost, which are a barrier to employment
- Specific discriminations linked to their single mother status, which come on top of all the discriminations that mothers generally face (i.e. all those discriminations related to gender that women face in labour market access, wage, promotion, etc. + the “motherhood penalty”)
- The lack of education and professional skills in case of early pregnancies, which usually results in an early drop-out of school

Single mothers are therefore often forced to accept:

- More precarious contracts, more part-time work
- Jobs in low-value sectors of activity (cleaning, catering, manual production work, etc.), which do not require high professional skills and whose schedules are predictable
- Work which is often informal, which means they have no or insufficient social protection coverage

In other words, access to decent work often remains elusive for most single mothers.

And if all this was not enough, in many societies single mothers are also socially excluded and stigmatized for being single-mothers and de-facto excluded from the labour market.

Single mothers are over-represented in poverty statistics

Between the challenge of juggling the unpaid work of raising children alone, the barriers they face in accessing decent work, and the exclusion and stigmatization from society, single mothers and their children are all too often over-represented among the poorest, with dire consequences for the future of those children.

According to Oxfam, globally, extreme poverty rates are 4% higher for women than men, a gender gap that rises to 22% during women's reproductive years⁴. In other words, mothers are already more likely to be poor than women without children.

In every country for which statistics exist and are comparable, i.e. mostly high and upper middle-income countries, single-mother households with young children have higher rates of poverty when compared to dual-parent households with young children. Rates and magnitude of this difference in poverty rates varies

² Ibid. See also 'Expert's take: By undercounting single mothers, we underserve families, Antra Bhatt, UN Women website article February 2020 <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/2/experts-take-antra-bhatt-on-single-parent-households>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Time to Care, Oxfam 2020

substantially: Luxembourg stands out with the largest percentage point difference (50.4), followed by Czechoslovakia (42.4), Canada (40.0) and the United States (37.2)⁵.

Still, many grassroots organisations have realised the magnitude of the problem and the importance of supporting single mothers and their children.

Among MMM member associations, solutions and good practices exist, which may be transposed to other places and scaled-up. What's more, these actions demonstrate that when single mothers are taken into account and receive adequate support, they represent an important economic force for development, that of their children and their community.

These actions often focus on equipping single mothers with the skills and resources to become entrepreneurs, in particular in the agricultural sector, or to answer the needs of the labour market. Connecting single-mothers via self-help groups can also be a solution for childcare.

But more needs to be done, and governments also have a key role to play to:

- Monitor the status of single mothers in specific statistics
- Improve flexible and affordable/subsidized childcare solutions
- Provide training in financial literacy and professional skills which are in demand
- Support women entrepreneurship
- Implement social policies specifically aimed at single mothers

Objectives of the Side-Event

The main purpose of our side-event is to raise awareness on the specific challenges faced by single mothers all over the world to access decent work, and to discuss solutions to address these challenges, lift these mothers out of poverty and exclusion, and reduce inequalities between single mothers and the rest of the population.

Our objectives:

- To draw attention to the many and diverse challenges faced by single mothers, their over-representation in poverty statistics, and the necessity to support them to lift them and their children out of poverty, so that they are not left behind, a key element to the realisation of the 2030 agenda
- To share solutions implemented by grassroots associations, which economically and socially support single mothers on their way to become financially independent and respected in their community. To inspire other associations and governments to support, replicate and scale-up such actions
- To call governments to action: to develop and implement social policies which target single mothers and their children, while taking into account the specificities of their situation

Modality and list of speakers

This event is organized by Make Mothers Matter as a **Zoom webinar** which will last 1:15 hours.

⁵ Progress of the world's women report 2019-2020: Families in a changing world, UN Women.

See also the report's global fact sheet:

<https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2019/POW-W-2019-Fact-sheet-Global-en.pdf>

It will have the form of a panel: after an introductory part, a first presentation will 'set the scene'. It will be followed by a round of short presentations - some by video messages – showcasing grassroots organizations' actions to support single mothers in different contexts across the world. The last presentation will focus on policy-making, including best practices from the EU and MMM recommendations. A Q&A Session will provide the opportunity for further discussion before closing.

Moderator:

- **Anne Fennel, Chair, Mothers At Home Matter (MAHM)**

Introductory remarks:

- **Olivier De Schutter, UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights (TBC)**

Panel:

Setting the scene:

- **Antra Bhatt, Statistician, UN Women - *The statistics and realities of single mothers: making them visible to policy makers***

Solutions from the ground:

Several successful actions from grassroots organisation across the world from MMM Network and beyond, will be presented, either via live presentations or short videos.

- **Mahjouba Edbouche, Founder & president, Ahdanne, Morocco** – Support for single mothers through counselling, child care and women shelter (video message)
- **Eliska Kodysova, CEO, Aperio, Czech Republic** – Single but strong: a program to empower single parents
- **Nazma Akter, Founder, Awaj Foundation, Bangladesh** - Services (e.g. childcare) and advocacy for mothers in the garments industry (video message)
- **Speaker TBC, CEPRODIH, Uruguay** - Training programs for socio-economic inclusion of mothers in vulnerable situations
- **Jean-Philippe Byamungu, Director, HAD/En Avant les Enfants, DRC** - Empowering young single mothers in the agricultural sector and making them count in the community (video message)
- **Yolanda Arias González, Isadora Duncan, Spain** – Advocacy and support for single parents in vulnerable situations (e.g. training in personal finance and saving possibilities, legal and administrative support)
- **Lydia Anyengo, Passion to share Foundation - Project Kenya** - Empowering mothers in the Kibera slum, Kenya through training and childcare services

Solutions from governments

- **Johanna Schima, head of EU delegation, Make Mothers Matter** - An example of good practice from the governments of the European Union: the EU Child Guarantee as a first step in the right direction + MMM recommendations to EU countries

Q&A session

The webinar will be held in English with simultaneous interpretation in French.

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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