



68TH SESSION OF THE UN COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN
11 – 22 MARCH 2023

Concept note for a parallel online event

Let's change the narrative: Invest in Mothers

20 March 2023 – 9:30 am New York EDT/2:30 pm Paris CET

Event to be held on Zoom as part of the NGO CSW Forum

The proposed event relates to the priority theme: *'Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective'*. It focuses on the particular impact of investing in mothers as a pivotal strategy for breaking the cycle of poverty, creating a transformative ripple effect that extends far beyond the individual household.

When resources are directed towards empowering mothers, whether through a fair distribution of care work, education, skill development, addressing mental health issues or access to financial services, the benefits are manifold. By providing mothers with the tools to enhance their economic independence, but also by recognizing publicly both the indispensable value of care work and the disproportionate weight carried by women, in particular when they are mothers, we not only uplift the mothers themselves but also set in motion a positive cycle of inter-generational change. As a result, the next generation is more likely to break free from the cycle of poverty and economic, social and cultural barriers, creating a sustainable and upward trajectory that contributes to the overall positive development of communities and societies.

Background

Navigating the journey of motherhood in today's world presents an intricate web of challenges, demanding resilience and resourcefulness from mothers. The un-acknowledged complexities range from societal expectations of being a "good mom" and economic pressures to the juggling act of balancing financial independence with the responsibilities of caregiving.

In addition, women who are mothers often find themselves contending with specific and persistent gender bias that permeates workplaces, hindering their access to formal work, career advancement and perpetuating wages and pension gaps¹, which tend to increase with the number of children. In turn this "motherhood penalty", has a negative impact on mothers' financial autonomy and can lead to economic

¹ See <https://ilostat.ilo.org/equal-pay-for-work-of-equal-value-where-do-we-stand-in-2023/> - See also ILO's 2015 working paper *The motherhood pay gap: A review of the issues, theory and international evidence* on https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/working-papers/WCMS_348041/lang--en/index.htm

hardships or even poverty, with detrimental effects on children. The expectation to fulfill traditional caregiving roles while balancing economic stability and independence creates a delicate tightrope walk for mothers.

The issue of unpaid care and domestic work is at the root of the ‘motherhood penalty’ and the social and economic injustice suffered by mothers: not only this work is inequitably distributed, but it is also invisible, unrecognized, and undervalued, even when it is paid. It is at the root of gender inequality and the discriminations women face, in particular when they are mothers.

Yet, unpaid domestic and care work sustains society and the economy, a reality exposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. The Pandemic also shed light on the key role of mothers in the care and education of children, a role which is particularly crucial for early childhood development. Not only mothers thus play a central and indispensable role in the functioning and long-term sustainability of society and the economy, but their contributions also go beyond traditional caregiving responsibilities and encompass various aspects of human well-being and social cohesion.

In fact, investing in mothers could yield important returns, not only for themselves and their children, but also for communities and society as a whole. We at MMM are convinced that mothers who are recognized, educated and adequately supported can be powerful agent of change and contribute to build a better future for us all.

Investing in mothers means in particular addressing the feminization of poverty and the inequitable distribution of unpaid care and domestic work that underpins it. But it also means equipping mothers with the right tools and support they need to fulfil both their caregiving responsibilities and their role in the civil and economic spheres. This includes: ensuring that every mother benefits from maternity protection and social protection, access to education - including parenting education - and professional training, access to health – including mental health services, access to public services, including childcare services, etc.

While some statistics shed light on some of the particular challenges faced by mothers, in particular those living in poverty, it is crucial to recognize that these numbers often only scratch the surface, leaving many aspects of their struggles invisible. For example, although it becomes increasingly recognized, the ‘motherhood penalty’ suffered by women on the labour market is yet to be systematically measured and integrated in gender statistics. Understanding why and how mothers remain invisible in statistics, and addressing this invisibility is imperative for developing effective interventions and monitor their effects.

More research is also needed on the impact of investing in mothers and on the return on investments – or on the cost of inaction. Such research exists for Early Childhood Development², as well as in relation to maternal mental health³; but much more needs to be done.

Lastly, it is also important to change mentalities and the perception that societies have on mothers and other unpaid caregivers, their realities and the multiple challenges they face. Data could be used in public campaigns and awareness raising initiatives to support such change, to make it clear that every mother ‘works’ and deserves collective recognition and support.

² See the work of Nobel Laureate Professor James Heckman (University of Chicago) on investing in Early Childhood Care and Education, the Leckman Equation: <https://heckmanequation.org> – see also the work of the Early Childhood Peace Consortium (ECPC): <https://ecdpeace.org/>

³ See 2014 LSE study on the return of investing in maternal mental health vs. costs of inaction: <https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/59885/>

Objective of the Side-Event

The main purpose of this side event is to further the conversation about laying the foundations for a more compassionate society—one where the value of care work is recognized and distributed more equitably. Its overarching goal is to inspire collective action, turning the discussion into tangible efforts that empower mothers as vital agents for positive change in the ongoing battle against poverty.

More precisely our objectives are:

- To make the case for investing in mothers
- To identify data and research gaps on the challenges faced by mothers and other unpaid caregivers and thus equip policy makers with facts and figures
- To call for action – e.g. what does investing in mothers concretely mean in terms of policy making?
- To showcase a concrete example of mothers' support at the grassroots level

Modality and provisional list of speakers

There will be a short introduction from the moderator and a teaser video to set the scene (TBC). After short presentations that will be articulated along the objectives listed above, the floor will be open to questions and input from participants as starting points for further discussions.

Moderator: **Afaf Abounouadar**, Executive Director, **Make Mothers Matter (MMM)**

Teaser video: Vox Pop (TBC)

Panelists:

- **Emese Domosi**, Board Director, **Mothers centers International Network for Empowerment (MINE)**, an MMM member organisation active in about 20 countries across Europe and beyond – *Mother centers: a concrete way of supporting mothers*
- **Farah Arabe**, Founder & President, itotheN Consulting & Co-President, **Harvard Kennedy School Women's Network** – *The case for investing in mothers and what does that mean for policy making*
- **Misty Heggeness**, Associate Professor, School of Public Affairs and Administration, **University of Kansas**
Data and research gaps to encourage investments in mothers and monitor related policy making
- **Michelle Davis**, Tax Principal, **Deloitte**
The case for investing in Mothers in the corporate world

This event is organized by Make Mothers Matter. Partnerships are foreseen with academic and civil society organizations, which will be invited as speakers.

About Make Mother Matter - MMM

Make Mothers Matter (MMM) is an international NGO created in 1947 to raise the awareness of policy makers and public opinion on the contribution of mothers to social, cultural and economic development. MMM has no political or religious affiliations, and thus transparently voices the concerns of mothers at international level with permanent MMM representatives at the United Nations (General Consultative Status), UNESCO and the European Union.

Contacts:

- Aurelie Cole: MMM UN Representative in New York – aurelie@makemothersmatter.org
- Marie Delecourt, MMM UN Representative in New York – marie@makemothersmatter.org
- Valerie Bichelmeier, MMM Vice-President (Geneva) – valerie@makemothersmatter.org