



## 2025 High Level Political Forum

### Written Statement

**“Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals for leaving no one behind”.**

### **Prioritising Target 5.4 to build synergies between SDGs**

In this written statement, Make Mothers Matter (MMM) highlights the importance of Target 5.4 under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on gender equality, which is under review this year: *“Recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies, and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate.”*

**We urge greater attention to this target, which continues to receive insufficient focus despite its fundamental importance—not only for achieving gender equality but also for advancing other SDGs, including SDG3 and SDG8, both also under review.**

**Focusing on this target and its associated indicator offers the potential to create meaningful synergies across SDGs implementation efforts.**

#### ***Target 5.4, a neglected but pivotal target***

Target 5.4 recognise the value of care and calls for more equitable distribution of unpaid domestic and care work between men and women. It also emphasises the role of public services, infrastructure, and social protection in addressing this issue.

Despite its importance, the implementation of Target 5.4 has received limited attention and is “off track”.

The sole indicator for this target—Indicator 5.4.1, measuring the proportion of time spent on unpaid care and domestic work disaggregated by sex, age, and location—requires Time-Use Surveys (TUS), which are expensive and complex to conduct. As a result, this data is scarce.

Although the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action called for regular time-use studies<sup>1</sup>, and statistical tools like the UN International Classification of Activities for Time-Use Statistics<sup>2</sup> and work by UNECE<sup>3</sup> have advanced this agenda, implementation lags.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/classifications/Family/Detail/2083>

<sup>3</sup> <https://unece.org/statistics/ces/time-use-surveys>

The 2013 resolution of the International Conference of Labour Statisticians on *Statistics of work, employment and labour underutilisation*<sup>4</sup> provided another impetus to measure unpaid care work: it introduced a new statistical definition of ‘work’ as being ‘any activity performed by persons of any sex and age to produce goods or to provide services for use by others or for own use’, effectively recognising unpaid domestic and care work as a new ‘work’ category to be measured in Labour Force Surveys.

However, according to UN Stat<sup>5</sup>, only 92 countries have conducted TUS at least once since 2000, and only 4 since 2020. Very few countries carry out TUS on a regular basis, which would be necessary to monitor progress in reduction and redistribution of unpaid domestic and care work: the United States is the only country which has done so on a yearly basis since 2003; and Switzerland has conducted TUS every three or four years since 1997<sup>6</sup>.

Consequently, Target 5.4 is often omitted from SDG progress reports<sup>7</sup> and remains out of the spotlight.

Worse, little progress has been made: women’s share of unpaid care work declined by just 0.2% over 15 years (1997–2012), according to the International Labour Organisation<sup>8</sup>.

### ***The case for Time-Use Surveys—to be used across most SDGs***

Time-use data is essential not only for SDG 5 but across the entire SDG framework.

As detailed in a 2020 UN Statistical Commission background report<sup>9</sup>, time-use data can inform policymaking in numerous areas:

- To analyse the links between monetary poverty and time poverty, how time poverty is distributed, and how in a vicious circle economic poverty reinforces time poverty (SDG1);
- To apprehend and support health care services provided for free by households, usually by women; and to understand engagement in activities that can affect health, such as eating, drinking, sleeping and sports (SDG3)
- To address the issue of girls dropping out from school because they are needed for domestic work (SDG4)
- To show and support parents’ involvement in the formal education of their children, e.g. through overseeing homework, participating in school activities, etc. (SDG4)

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/global/statistics-and-databases/standards-and-guidelines/resolutions-adopted-by-international-conferences-of-labour-statisticians/WCMS\\_230304/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/statistics-and-databases/standards-and-guidelines/resolutions-adopted-by-international-conferences-of-labour-statisticians/WCMS_230304/lang--en/index.htm)

<sup>5</sup> SDG indicator metadata for indicator 5.4.1—Available on <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/files/Metadata-05-04-01.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> See <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/fr/home/statistiques/travail-remuneration/activite-professionnelle-temps-travail/conciliation-travail-non-remunere/compte-satellite-production-menages.html>

<sup>7</sup> See for example the 2021 report <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/report/2021/secretary-general-sdg-report-2021--Statistical-Annex.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Care work and Care jobs for the future of decent work, ILO report, 2020

<sup>9</sup> Policy relevance: Making the case for time-use data collections in support of SDGs monitoring—UNSD & ECLAC 2020 - Background paper for the 51st UN Statistical Commission <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/51st-session/documents/BG-Item3m-PolicyRelevance-E.pdf>

- To plan for the provision of quality early childhood care and education services, which not only prepare children for primary education (SDG4), but also free up time for mothers and other caregivers to do paid work, participate in public life and engage in politics (SDG 5 and 8)
- To understand the connections between paid and unpaid work and support better work-life balance, in particular for parents, which would in turn increase women's labour force participation or income generating activities (SDG8)
- To develop public infrastructure and services such as clean water and sanitation, electricity and energy, telecommunications or transport in order to reduce the unpaid work needed to palliate the absence of these infrastructure and services (SDGs 6, 7, 9 and 11)
- To understand and address the disproportionate impact of Climate Change on women—in particular the increase of unpaid work (SDG13)

### ***Interlinking target 5.4 and other SDGs***

Unpaid care work is intricately connected to other SDGs:

- SDG1: Women's disproportionate share of unpaid domestic and care work results in time poverty. It limits their mobility and access to education, employment, and income-generating activities, undermining their financial independence and increasing their vulnerability to poverty.
- SDG2: Women play a crucial role in ensuring food and nutrition. This begins with breastfeeding, which provides babies with a healthy and affordable diet. In most households, women are also responsible for purchasing or growing food and preparing meals. Ensuring food security and a healthy diet for their families requires time and constitutes a significant part of women's unpaid care work and responsibilities.
- SDG3: Mothers are frontline—yet unpaid—health workers. They make decisions about health and well-being, including healthy lifestyles and nutrition, and care for sick children and relatives. However, this unpaid care work also negatively affects women's own health, especially their mental health. The 2024 survey conducted by MMM across Europe<sup>10</sup> shows that half of the mothers surveyed report suffering from a mental health issue. This can hinder their ability to care for their children effectively, with adverse effects on the children's health and education. These consequences can be especially severe during early childhood, where neglect or abuse can jeopardise development with lifelong implications.
- SDG4: Unpaid care work remains a major barrier to girls' education. Supporting children throughout their schooling, including helping with homework, is a key factor in academic success and requires parental time and skills.
- SDG5: The inequitable distribution of unpaid care work is at the root of gender inequality, and an impediment to the realisation of the 2030 agenda.

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<sup>10</sup> MMM State of Motherhood in Europe 2024— <https://makemothermatter.org/mmm-state-of-motherhood-in-europe-2024/>

- SDG6: 1.8 billion people still live in households without access to drinking water on the premises<sup>11</sup>. In such case, the unpaid task of fetching water—typically carried out by women and girls—compensates for the lack of proper water infrastructure.
- SDG7: Similarly, the lack of access to affordable and reliable energy increases unpaid domestic work, including cooking and fuel collection.
- SDG8: The inequitable distribution of unpaid care work remains a barrier for many women to access the labour force, make a career and earn a decent income on an equal footing with men, especially when they are mothers.
- SDG9: The development of public infrastructure and services is crucial for reducing the time and effort spent on unpaid domestic and care tasks: in addition to water and energy, these also include access to transportation, communication, healthcare, and education facilities.
- SDG10: Unpaid care work is a root cause of inequality between men and women, but also among women: wealthier women can afford to outsource domestic and care work, thereby spending less time on unpaid work compared to poorer women.
- SDG11: Urban planning can significantly improve the lives of unpaid caregivers by ensuring proximity or accessibility to essential public infrastructure and services such as healthcare, schools, and care facilities.
- SDG12: The purchase or production of food, clothes and other daily necessities usually falls under unpaid domestic work, as does household waste management. Ensuring sustainability, minimising and recycling waste requires additional time and efforts, mostly by women.
- SDG13: Climate change, like most crises, increases unpaid care work. It negatively affects health, thereby increasing both formal and informal healthcare needs. Climate-induced desertification forces women and girls to walk longer distances to fetch water or collect firewood<sup>12</sup>.

In summary, a focus on Target 5.4—to reduce and redistribute unpaid care work—not only contributes to the achievement of SDG 5 but also advances progress on SDGs 1, 8, and 10. Likewise, recognising and supporting the vital role of unpaid care work in food security and nutrition, health, education, and sustainable consumption and production is essential to achieving SDGs 2, 3, 4, and 12. Conversely, the effective implementation of SDGs 6, 7, 9, and 11 is critical to enabling progress on Target 5.4 and SDG5 as a whole. Finally, acknowledging the impact of climate change and other crises on unpaid care work is key to shaping effective mitigation and adaptation policies (SDG13).

**To accelerate progress on the 2030 Agenda, it is therefore essential to understand and leverage the interlinkages between Target 5.4 and other SDGs. This target, along with its indicator and supporting statistical tools, must be given greater importance as a common thread running through most—if not all—of the Sustainable Development Goals.**

<sup>11</sup> Source: <https://www.who.int/news/item/06-07-2023-women-and-girls-bear-brunt-of-water-and-sanitation-crisis---new-unicef-who-report>

<sup>12</sup> See the UN Women working paper *the Climate Care nexus* (available on <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/working-paper-the-climate-care-nexus-en.pdf>), and the report of MMM 2024 HLPF side-event 'Mothers, unpaid care work and crises: connecting the dots' (available on <https://makemothersmatter.org/envisioning-care-as-a-common-thread-to-global-crises/>)

### ***Building synergies: centring care in policymaking***

These links show that care—encompassing child care, care and support for older persons and people with disability, healthcare and education—is inherently multidimensional and multisectoral.

A care-centred approach can also extend to caring for the environment and promoting policies that recognise the interdependence between people and ecosystems. This can help shift from extractive models to regenerative, sustainable practices.

Embedding care in governance through integrated and cross-sectoral approaches rather than siloed interventions, policymaking becomes more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable—while unlocking synergies across SDGs.

### ***Towards care-centred wellbeing economy***

Centring care in policymaking also reflects a paradigm shift from extractive, growth-driven economic models to regenerative, care-based frameworks that prioritises well-being, equity, and planetary health, and that recognises, values and supports the work of caring.

The shift is already underway. The governments of Finland, Iceland, New Zealand, Scotland and Wales are pioneering “wellbeing economies”<sup>13</sup>. Cities like Amsterdam, Berlin, Brussels, and Sydney have adopted the doughnut economic model, balancing social needs and ecological boundaries<sup>14</sup>.

**Given the scale and intersectionality of today’s global crises, we must urgently recalibrate our economic priorities. Whether we call it a “wellbeing economy,” a “caring economy,” or a “doughnut economy”, it high time to prioritise the wellbeing of people and the planet, and the sustainability of life.**

**It begins with recognising and resourcing care. That means elevating Target 5.4—its importance, its data, and its implications—as central to achieving the 2030 Agenda.**

### **About Make Mothers Matter**

*Since 1947, MMM has been at the forefront of advocating for mothers' rights and recognition worldwide, raising awareness amongst policy makers and the general public on the contributions of mothers towards social, cultural and economic development. MMM has no political or religious affiliations. Working with local partners, MMM advocates on influential global platforms including the European Union, the United Nations (General Consultative Status), and UNESCO, ensuring that the lived realities of mothers are voiced and that the injustices they suffer are acknowledged. Our aim is to change society's view and influence laws, policies and practices in their favours, so that they are fully recognised and supported in their various roles.*

<sup>13</sup> <https://wellbeingeconomy.org/wego>

<sup>14</sup> See the Doughnut Economics Action Lab (DEAL) <https://doughnuteconomics.org/>