

Mother's Poverty in the EU: Calling for Increased Support and Inclusivity



Founded in 1947, MMM is an international NGO with a global network of members. Drawing on the expertise of its members, MMM amplifies the voices of mothers at the UN (with general consultative status), EU and UNESCO. Our advocacy at the EU has been key for advancing mothers' rights, contributing to initiatives like the work-life balance Directive and the Care Strategy, among many.

Key Messages

This policy brief outlines the numerous challenges mothers in the EU face in terms of poverty, the barriers they encounter, and MMM's recommendations to increase support opportunities across social protection, health, and education systems. This brief focuses on the intersection of gender inequality within the labor market and the unequal distribution of unpaid care work.

Key Challenges

Parenthood and re-skilling

However, while caring for others, mothers develop a new set of skills, called soft skills, that contribute to social inclusion, personal development, empowerment, and employability. If properly recognized and valued, parenthood soft skills could benefit both employees and employers, and society at large.

Gender equality

Employment, earnings and pension gaps between men and women cannot be solved without substantive action on care work, mostly undertaken by mothers. Gender equality will not be achieved until unpaid care work is recognized, reduced, and redistributed equally and that economic prosperity is unattainable without these changes occurring.

Active support to employment

Being a parent continues to hinder women's participation in the labour market, with mothers struggling to balance their time between working and educating their children which often has repercussions on their careers.

Active support to families

Families are at the centre of nurturing care for young children. To provide it, they need information, resources and services. Parents who want to care for their under school-age children themselves

Active support to single mothers

The risk of poverty and social exclusion is particularly high among vulnerable groups like mothers (especially single mothers). 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.

Active support to women in old age

The feminization of poverty among the elderly (age 65 and above) is caused by lower pension levels, which result from gender pay gap, and part-time schedule and career interruptions to take up care work at home.

Maternal health

The right to health, and more particularly the right to maternal physical and mental health, are both human rights rooted on the key principle of human dignity. Support models must be designed and reinforced to ensure equal access to necessary services.

MMM's Recommendations

1. Recognition and validation of the soft skills acquired through parenthood and unpaid care work through support tools like MAAM, MAV, and MothersCan.
2. Recognition of unpaid care work and its impact on mothers' opportunities in the labor market.
3. Introduce support incentives targeting unpaid care work such as 'one-stop shops', community-based and intergenerational childcare, and flexible parental leave.
4. Promote a life-cycle approach to employment, and access to lifelong learning and re-skilling.
5. Develop and build on support measures for self-employed mothers such as business continuity grants, peer support networks, business management services and more.
6. Bolster active support to families through models like Finland's ECEC system, Belgium's 'time-credit' system, and recognize the impacts of non-take up amongst mothers.
7. Raise awareness for challenges faced by women in old age and implement pension care credits and non-linear careers.
8. Promote more holistic care approaches to ensure limited negative impacts on mother's mental and physical health, particularly in the first 1000 days postpartum.