

Supporting Mothers with Disabilities: A Call for Enhanced Care and Resources



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 intersectional challenges mothers with disabilities face, namely limited access to healthcare facilities, lack of day-to-day support and immense discrimination. This is largely perpetuated by underrepresentation, leading to misconceptions and prejudices regarding their ability to provide care. In addition, this brief addresses 'disability by proxy,' a term used to describe the structural and societal barriers mothers experience as primary, often unpaid, caregivers to children with disabilities. This caregiving role often limits their access to education and employment, contributing to discrimination in hiring practice, pay and career development. This policy brief will propose strategies in order to improve the support, care and understanding mothers with disabilities and mothers caring for children with disabilities should receive.

Maternal mental health

The societal stigma, caregiving challenges and lack of support that mothers with disabilities face can often result in significant mental health challenges including anxiety, stress and depression. These issues are often overlooked due to lack of awareness of the challenges these mothers face.

Unpaid care work

Unpaid care work is disproportionately carried out by mothers, including those with disabilities, and is often invisible and undervalued. For mothers who experience 'disability by proxy' due to their caregiving responsibilities, these demands often limit their ability to find employment. This unpaid care and domestic work can be physically demanding and mentally taxing, especially for women with disabilities. The work, which often goes unrecognised, is made additionally challenging as a result of the discriminations they face.

Key Challenges

Access to healthcare services

Mothers with disabilities often face numerous barriers to accessing quality healthcare, including physical, informational and attitudinal obstacles. Inaccessible healthcare facilities and the absence of

adaptive equipment further isolates them from the healthcare system. In addition, the lack of disability awareness among healthcare providers creates significant challenges including biased treatment or inadequate care. Overall, these frame healthcare facilities as spaces of neglect and lacking safety.

Discrimination and Bias

Discrimination remains a significant issue for mothers with disabilities and is the main driver of many of the inequalities they face. Negative stereotypes and misconceptions regarding their ability to care for their children often leads to discriminatory practices. In healthcare settings, biases can lead to a lack of respectful care, where women with disabilities are not treated as autonomous individuals capable of making informed decisions about their reproductive health. Similar biases operate in employment settings, reinforcing barriers to an equitable hiring process.

MMM's Recommendations

1. Promote a more inclusive healthcare environment that addresses not just the physical but also the mental health needs of mothers with disabilities.
2. Development of an inclusive infrastructure and legal and social protection systems that support both caregivers and those they care for, recognising their unpaid care and domestic work.
3. Raising awareness of the value of unpaid care work and its impact.
4. Promote the training of healthcare staff in disability-inclusive care such as through the EU funded [ASSIST](#) project.
5. Enhance the availability of assistive technologies that improve communication and mobility.
6. Ensure the voices of people with disabilities and their families are promoted in policy making and decisions regarding their rights with a particular focus on existing advocacy groups and community organisations.