



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission for Social Development

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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the  
twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority  
theme: rethinking and strengthening social development in the  
contemporary world**

### **Statement submitted by Make Mothers Matter, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council**

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



## **Statement**

### **Supporting the development of mothers in the contemporary world**

Make Mothers Matter welcomes the possibility of rethinking and strengthening social development by raising awareness of the issue of unpaid family-care work.

Make Mothers Matter believes that unpaid care work contributes significantly to well-being, social development and economic growth. Because we approach the situation of women from the specific angle of mothers, we refer specifically to family-care work when addressing the issue of care work.

To transform the daily lives of millions of mothers, we have to rethink this issue, which comprises two main interconnected challenges, to improve social development: the recognition of unpaid family-care work as a vital social link within society and the establishment of policies that allow mothers to re-enter the labour market and be full actors of development within their communities, without being penalized for their unpaid family-care work.

The participation of women and men in the labour market, and therefore their access to economic resources, is unequal for structural and social reasons. One main reason for that inequality is motherhood.

Many studies show that mothers, more than fathers, put their family responsibilities before their career, taking career breaks or part-time jobs for family reasons.

That choice hinders their careers, financial income, future financial security and social recognition. These negative consequences have a name: the motherhood penalty.

Make Mothers Matter believes that measures encouraging fathers to take more responsibilities in family life are essential and strongly supports them. However, until responsibilities are shared equally, we have to be aware of the reality of mothers and of what they want.

The results of a survey conducted in Europe by Make Mothers Matter (in 10 languages and 16 countries and with close to 12,000 respondents), show that mothers have very similar aspirations all over Europe. They want recognition, more time with their children and real choices.

According to the survey, mothers seek recognition of the importance of their role in contributing to the well-being of their children and their family, but also to the future of society.

A majority of them want to spend more time with their children. They want to be active in the labour market, while being able to care for their family, giving priority to one or the other depending on the age and number of children.

However, mothers do not have a real choice between taking care of their children themselves and being active on the labour market. Either way, there is a well-documented motherhood penalty, and therefore a higher risk of poverty for mothers and their children.

The risk of poverty is aggravated in developing countries where the lack of public services, infrastructures and legislation, among other structural reasons, is a

further impediment to the empowerment of mothers. Mothers in this situation are often faced with the double challenge of having to care for their children while having to carry out income-generating activities to survive.

Specifically, addressing motherhood is a matter of gender equality. Motherhood should not be considered as an obstacle but as a reality to which the labour market and society must adapt.

The strategic objective contained in the Beijing Platform for Action on eliminating discriminatory practices by employers against women who are pregnant, on maternity leave or re-entering the labour market is far from having been achieved.

### **Recommendations**

As time poverty is a central issue for most women around the world, conciliation measures and policies should address the issue of “time to work, time to care”.

Make Mothers Matter suggests a life-cycle approach that allows women and men to pursue discontinuous careers, leaving the labour market partially or completely for a definite period of time to care for and educate their children.

Such a new vision of professional life can be made possible by facilitating re-entry into the labour market. Today, the fact that it is difficult to re-enter the labour market is a major impediment to leaving it, because periods during which one does not work are very quickly penalized.

This problem could be alleviated by:

- Providing easier access to life-long learning opportunities that lead to qualifications after career breaks;
- Recognizing the skills acquired and developed while performing unpaid family-care work. Instruments have been developed to address this and it would be good to promote their use. If the European Union wants to achieve its target of 75 per cent of employment by 2020, it is worth finding ways to help mothers to get back into the labour market, as an untapped source of skilled and competent labour.
- Adapting the regulatory framework of part-time jobs to eliminate the discrimination of part-time workers. In the Netherlands, where there is a favourable framework, 48 per cent of the workforce works part-time, with a result of 71 per cent female employment.
- Adapting pension schemes and introducing care credits or similar systems to compensate for unpaid family-care work periods. These periods should be recognized as contributive.

Resources spent today on addressing stress and burnout situations could be usefully reallocated to the implementation of such measures.

**Time-use surveys**

Effective measures to better balance family life and professional life will be introduced when the value of unpaid family-care work and non-formal education at home is recognized and taken into account by policymakers and employers. In the Beijing Platform for Action, it is stated that women's share in the labour force continues to rise, although there has not been a parallel lightening of responsibility of unremunerated work in the household and community, and that women's income is becoming increasingly necessary to households of all types. The result is that women work double shifts, which results in time poverty and is a strain on their health, on their children and on their family, generating stress and burnout.

The burden of unpaid care work for mothers is higher in developing countries, where such work too often compensates for the lack of public infrastructures and services. In such situations, the resulting time poverty is particularly critical and, by depriving women of precious time to care, learn and engage in income-generating activities, perpetuates a lack of education and economic poverty for mothers and their children.

Make Mothers Matter asks for accurate time-use surveys measuring and differentiating unpaid activities. Some time-use surveys even show that mothers who stay at home spend less time with their children than those working outside. That is because respondents can report one primary activity only, ignoring the fact that care could be a simultaneous activity.

Make Mothers Matter asks for studies that will give a monetary value to unpaid family-care work, to show the importance of such work to the paid economy. In her report to the General Assembly, in 2013, the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona, wrote that the monetary value of domestic work and caring for people was estimated at from 10 to over 50 per cent of the gross domestic product.

Accurate time-use data and studies will make unpaid family-care work, which is mostly done by mothers, accounted for and, hopefully, taken into account by policymakers and employers. It will also contribute to the recognition mothers are asking for, and with recognition will come measures.

Mothers' exhaustion and stress, single motherhood and increased poverty among mothers and children are part of today's family life. It is a worldwide societal challenge that needs to be addressed.

Make Mothers Matter fully supports the statement that the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) made in a media brief on the occasion of the publication of a report entitled *Doing Better for Families*, in 2011, which provides a direction for rethinking social development, namely that OECD countries need to find an optimal balance between preparing families for life in the labour market and preparing the labour market for the lives of families.