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Statement submitted by Federation Europeenne des Femmes Actives en Famille, Foundation for GAIA, Global Fund for Women, International Council of Women, International Federation of Social Workers, International Movement for Fraternal Union among Races and Peoples, Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children, Make Mothers Matter, Mothers Legacy Project, Organisation Mondiale des associations pour l’éducation prenatale and Planterary Association for Clean Energy, non-governmental organizations 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Motherhood in the changing world of work

In one or two generations, women's labour force participation has greatly increased and their paid work now represents a significant contribution to most economies around the world.

However, women's "other work" — that is their unpaid domestic and care work to reproduce and sustain families — still remains largely invisible and unrecognized. Globally women still do 2 ½ times more unpaid family care and domestic work than men, for a total monetary value estimated between 10 and 50% of Gross Domestic Product, depending on the country and how this value is estimated. And when paid and unpaid work is combined, women work longer hours than men.

The Motherhood penalty

Yet, instead of being recognized and valued for combining these care and professional responsibilities, women continue to be penalized. In particular, working mothers encounter systematic disadvantages and obstacles, that are more and more documented and recognized. This "Motherhood penalty" has 3 components:

1. **Hiring penalty:**

Several studies have shown that women are discriminated at hiring simply because they are mothers. A study published in 2007 in the American Journal of Sociology notes: "Mothers were judged as significantly less competent and committed than women without children [...] Mothers were also held to harsher performance and punctuality standards. [...] They needed a significantly higher score on the management exam than non-mothers before being considered hireable."*

2. **Wage penalty:**

In all regions, working mothers suffer a wage penalty in addition to the existing gender wage gap. This Motherhood wage gap persists even when children grow up, and is also reinforced by the "fatherhood bonus", where men enjoy an increase in wages when they have children. The little available data suggests that:

- The magnitude of this earning gap suffered by mothers varies a lot between countries; but it is usually larger in developing countries than in developed countries (for ex. an average of 42 % in a study of 21 developing countries)
- The motherhood pay gap is nevertheless universal and increases with the number of children.

3. **Promotion penalty**

The "glass ceilings" and "sticky floors" are a reality for all women, but the situation is even worse for mothers. The United States study mentioned above also showed that mothers were 100% less likely to be promoted than non-mothers. A 2014 survey of 2,000 mothers and 500 managers conducted in the United Kingdom

found that six out of ten women felt side-lined at work after announcing their pregnancy.

The Motherhood penalty is usually explained as follows:

- Both childbearing and childrearing require time and effort that could be spent developing job skills, furthering education, or gaining experience at work.
- Stereotypes and cultural beliefs still prevail about a mother’s place and role: e.g. a “good mother’s” place is at home. She is expected to prioritize the needs of her children and family even if she works outside the home. Highly successful mothers can even be seen as less likable...
- Motherhood is increasingly perceived as a choice that a woman makes. Therefore, employers see mothers as choosing children over their career.

As a result, mothers are generally seen as less competent and less committed to their work. Further, many mothers make the choice of trading more flexibility for lower wages, falling into a “part-time trap” that enhances the Motherhood penalty.

The consequences of this Motherhood penalty are many:

- Women’s labour force participation has stagnated in most regions or even declined, and remains well below men’s participation.
- Women are overrepresented in precarious, informal and low wage employment, especially in developing countries where public infrastructures and services are lacking, which increases the time they must spend on unpaid work.
- Women remain underrepresented in management and decision-making positions both in the political and economic spheres.
- More and more “career women” delay pregnancy, which increases health risks for both mother and child; or they simply renounce having children, which contributes to ageing populations.
- Women’s life-time earning is on average much lower than men, as illustrated by large gender pension gaps observed in many countries (e.g. up to 48% in Germany, 75% in Turkey). The outcome is a higher risk of poverty in old age for women.
- The situation is particularly difficult for single-mother households: their number is on the rise and they are increasingly poor. For example, in the United States, 1 in 4 children under the age of 18 — i.e. a total of about 17.4 million — is being raised without a father, and 45% live below the poverty line.

Because of unpaid family care responsibilities and work, Motherhood remains one of the main structural barriers to women economic empowerment. This should not be considered as an obstacle but as a reality that the labour market has to adapt to, not only as a matter of equity, but also for the wellbeing of families, communities and the future of our societies.

Raising children requires time and dedication, and the current reality is that working mothers end-up working double shifts. The resulting time poverty puts a strain on their health, as well as on their children’s health and development,

generating stress and burnout situations — and these are unlikely to decline in the new world of work brought about by the “4th revolution”.

Motherhood and the changing world of work

Driven by globalization and technological revolutions, most notably the digital revolution, the world of work is undergoing tremendous changes. These are reflected in increasing levels of self-employment, subcontracting and temporary employment, induced by new business and organizational models, that require constant adaptation at an accelerating pace. A profound shift in the nature of work itself is also under way: medium skill jobs are expected to decline, while demand for workers with higher specialized skills and qualifications, especially in science and technology — where women are underrepresented — is expected to rise.

While self-employment using digital technology may provide opportunities and much needed flexibility for mothers — a trend we can already observe with the rise of “mompreneurs”, the precariousness and fast moving pace associated with the transformation of work present big challenges and risks to mothers and their families.

Mothers’ exhaustion, stress, single motherhood, increasing mothers and child poverty are already part of family life in many countries around the world. It is a societal challenge that is worsening and that urgently needs to be addressed.

Make Mothers Matter recommendations

1. Promote public spending on policies that support the unpaid care work of nurturing, raising, educating children as an investment in Early Childhood Development and human capital, and not as a mere expenditure. This view is increasingly supported by institutions such as the World Bank, and the potential return on investment is high: in addition to preventing social and health problems linked to burn out and stress, and countering declining fertility rates, it could help ensure that every child develops to its full physical, emotional, intellectual and social potential, which in turn could break the cycle of poverty, prevent violence and foster more peaceful societies.
2. Make unpaid family care work visible to policy makers and society by regularly conducting good quality Time Use Surveys, and assessing its monetary value as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product. And yet, Gross Domestic Product has shown its limits and its irrelevance to the well-being of people (and our planet); unpaid family care work should be included in alternate economic and social indicators currently under consideration to measure wellbeing (e.g. Beyond Gross Domestic Product, Genuine Progress Indicator, etc.).
3. Provide accessible, affordable and high-quality public services and infrastructures, in particular in the most disadvantaged and remote areas, with a focus on addressing the issue of women’s “time poverty”. Water, electricity, energy, information and communications technologies, transportation, proximity childcare and healthcare are needed to significantly reduce the time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, and thus free up time for remunerated activities. Internet access is also critical for women’s access to information, education, financial services, and to ensure the viability of self-employment.

4. Promote diverse work and family life reconciliation policies accessible for all, notably flexible working conditions that allow parents and other caregivers to access and stay in paid work. In particular, ensure regulations supporting quality part-time work and job sharing schemes allowing men and women to adjust their workload to their family responsibilities, and eliminate any type of discrimination against part-time workers (i.e. mainly mothers) regarding career advancement, pay level, social security, pension rights, etc.

5. Promote and support equal sharing of care responsibilities between men and women, between mothers and fathers (e.g. through paid paternity leaves, parental leaves accessible to both parents, awareness raising and education, etc.). Men caring for their children from the beginning will be more likely to continue during the whole childhood, which will benefit children, the mothers and the fathers themselves.

However, as noted in the 2015 State of the World's Fathers report, "achieving equality in care and domestic work is not simply an issue of individual men doing more. Employment and livelihood policies (childcare, tax and benefits systems, as well as health, education and social services) have not kept up with the changes taking place in families around the world, and this creates substantial barriers to families who try to operate in a more egalitarian approach." Paternity leave alone will not do the job: it is the whole system that needs to be adapted to this new reality.

6. Building on the resolution adopted by ILO member States at the 2013 International Conference of Labour Statisticians, legally recognize unpaid family care work as being a particular category of labour that gives status and rights to caregivers (e.g. access to social security, education and training, a voice in the democratic system, etc.).

7. In particular, recognize the periods dedicated to unpaid family care work in the calculation of pension rights ("care credits"). These periods are essential to society wellbeing and contribute to the economy and the building of tomorrow's workforce. They should be recognized as contributions as it already is the case in several states (France, Germany, Chile, etc.).

8. Take a lifecycle perspective and facilitate discontinuous career paths rather than linear ones, allowing men and women to withdraw from work partially or completely to educate and care for their children or dependent relatives, and then re-enter the labour market without being heavily penalized.

Such a life cycle approach can notably be supported by:

- Recognizing and validating the competences and skills acquired while doing unpaid family care work;
- Facilitating access to lifelong education in order to ensure that women and men of all ages can acquire and develop the knowledge, capacities, aptitudes and skills needed to fully adapt and participate in the paid labour market — this is all the more important in this fast changing world of work.