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Quarterly Bulletin of the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family

June 2026, No.138

Deadline for contributions: 15.08.2026

Vienna NGO Committee on the Family

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Dear Readers of 'Families International',

The 138th Families International, begins with a policy brief from UNICEF on gender equality in community health. The brief looks at how national community health policies address gender issues and highlights ways to make health systems more inclusive and responsive to the needs of women, men, girls, and boys.

The next feature is a UNICEF issue brief on artificial intelligence and child sexual abuse and exploitation. It examines how advances in generative AI are creating new risks for children online and outlines key actions needed to strengthen their protection.

Also included is a short article on digital child labour, an emerging issue affecting children in the digital economy. The article explores different forms of digital child labour, the risks children may face in these roles, and the steps needed to better protect their rights and wellbeing.

We are also pleased to include a contribution from Make Mothers Matter (MMM), focusing among other topics, on motherhood as a form of learning, parental leave, as well as the idea of rebuilding the Modern Village. As always, you will find a list of current and upcoming events relevant to families, children, and social policy at the end of this issue.

Sincerely,

Hannah Prüwasser; BA

Executive Editor

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Policy Brief

The Implementation Gap: Gender Equality in Community Health

December 2025

THE MOMENT



In 2017, African Heads of State committed to deploying two million Community Health Workers (CHWs) by 2030, a doubling of the current one million working across Africa today. CHWs form the foundation of Primary Health Care: the first point of contact for families, the bridge between households and health facilities, and the front line of outbreak response.

In 2022, UNICEF and Africa CDC launched a partnership to train and deploy 500,000 new CHWs by 2027. Implementation is underway. The 2023 Monrovia Call to Action named the path forward: professionalize, institutionalize, protect. Gender-intentional reform is central to each of these.

To advance that agenda, UNICEF commissioned a Gender Analytical Review of National Community Health Policies and Strategies across continental Africa. Every national community health policy framework reviewed references gender equality. Fewer than one in four include enforceable measures to achieve it. This gap between recognition and institutionalisation is where implementation stalls.

The consequences of weak policy are visible in preventable maternal and child deaths, in unplanned adolescent pregnancies that interrupt education, and in the erosion of trust between communities and the health systems meant to serve them. When CHWs lack support, attrition rises and coverage gaps widen. When literacy barriers exclude women from paid roles, the workforce does not reflect the communities it serves. When adolescents cannot access appropriate services, a generation navigates reproductive health, mental health and HIV prevention with limited support.

WHAT GENDER-INTENTIONAL MEANS



Gender-intentional reform addresses the root causes of gender inequality, including social norms that limit women's opportunities and constrain men's roles. It moves beyond equal treatment to enable shifts in power, resources and decision-making that produce equitable outcomes for women, men, girls and boys across the life course. Applied to

community health, this means examining how health systems are structured and delivered: who delivers care, who receives it, and how accountability works.

Who delivers care. Women constitute the majority of CHWs across Africa, yet many work without contracts, adequate compensation or occupational protection. In West and Central Africa, men hold most of the salaried CHW positions while women predominate in unpaid roles. In Eastern and Southern Africa, women form the majority but often work on modest stipends without formal employment terms. Policies that include quotas, literacy pathways and gender-sensitive recruitment criteria can shift these patterns. A promising practice is Liberia's policy mandating that at least 30 per cent of CHWs be women and links recruitment to adult literacy programmes.

Who receives care. Community health systems are tested by who they reach, how safely they can be accessed, and whether those they serve have a voice in shaping services. Adolescent girls appear more frequently than boys in national frameworks, yet few policies address the distinct needs of younger adolescents (10–14) compared to older adolescents (15–19). Younger adolescents require information on puberty, menstrual health, consent and safety. Older adolescents face different pressures around reproductive health, livelihoods and mobility. Adolescent boys are often grouped without differentiation. When policies do not distinguish between these groups or create space for adolescents to participate in service design, services fail to reach them.

How accountability works. Disaggregated data make inequities visible. Without data broken down by sex, age, disability and geography, the needs of women, men, girls and boys remain hidden from planning and budgeting. Governance structures with mandated representation ensure community voice in decisions. Without these, systems cannot identify and address gaps.

THE EVIDENCE



The Gender Analytical Review was commissioned to assess how national community health policies address gender equality across the African continent

It is the first continental analysis to systematically examine whether gender commitments are translated into enforceable standards, costed provisions, and accountable governance. The Review examined 70 policy documents from 56 countries and analysed 23 national frameworks in depth across Eastern and Southern Africa, West and Central Africa, and the Middle East and North Africa.

Across the 23 national frameworks reviewed, the gap between recognition and institutionalisation is consistent and measurable:

Recognition	Institutionalisation
78% reference women's participation	26% include enforceable measures
100% acknowledge financing needs	22% include gender-responsive allocations
52% require disaggregated data	Few link data to resource allocation
48% mention community governance	17% mandate women's representation

The pattern is consistent across regions: gender is referenced in policy language but not systematically integrated into the mandates, budgets and governance structures that translate commitment into practice. Recognition is necessary but insufficient. Without enforceable standards, commitments do not translate into changed outcomes for women, adolescents and the communities that CHWs serve.

FINDINGS BY POLICY LEVER



Gender-intentional reform works across five policy levers: governance, financing, workforce, service delivery and data systems, as demonstrated by the country examples below. Evidence shows that progress depends less on isolated reforms than on how policies align across the system. Progress occurs when reforms advance together across five policy levers.

1. Governance. Most frameworks reference community participation. Few mandate representation of women, adolescents, or people with disabilities, nor do they assign authority and resources to governance bodies. Zambia's

Neighbourhood Health Committee Guidelines establish committees with representation of women, youth and people with disabilities, with authority to link community priorities to district-level planning. Liberia requires gender balance in community health committees and connects these structures to recruitment and supervision. Ghana integrates community scorecards into national performance reviews.

- 2. Financing.** All frameworks acknowledge financing needs. Few include costed gender provisions or track expenditure against equity outcomes. Angola's fully costed community health strategy embeds gender allocations across services and infrastructure. Zimbabwe links stipend reform directly to gender equality and workforce retention. These examples demonstrate that gender-intentional financing is achievable within national budget processes.
- 3. Workforce.** All frameworks identify CHWs as essential. Few establish contracts, remuneration standards or maternity protections. Ghana includes literacy pathways and gender-sensitive entry points. Kenya and Liberia have integrated CHWs into government payroll systems. The Review also found that no frameworks promote recruiting younger CHWs as part of workforce development, despite the potential for intergenerational learning, career progression, and improved trust with adolescent populations.
- 4. Service delivery.** Most frameworks describe broad service packages. Few differentiate standards by age or sex. Zimbabwe has embedded adolescent health competencies within CHW training curricula. Yet across the 23 frameworks, only three define age-specific service packages. Few distinguish between the needs of younger and older adolescents, or between girls and boys. How a system serves adolescents indicates its capacity to respond to diverse needs.
- 5. Data systems.** Many frameworks require sex and age disaggregation. Few specify how data should inform planning or resource allocation. Mozambique, Tanzania and Uganda reference integration of community-level indicators into District Health Information Systems (DHIS2). Without mandated use, disaggregated data do not translate into accountability.



SUGGESTED ACTIONS

The five policy levers are interconnected, and progress requires coherent action across all five. For leaders, this means assessing where policies are misaligned and addressing gaps across all five levers together. Although some gender-intentional commitments exist, the following actions can help to leverage intent into institutional change across the five levers.

The priority:

Embed gender equality in the next policy revision cycle. National community health policies are revised periodically. The next revision is the entry point for moving from recognition to institutionalisation. This means assessing current policies against the five policy levers, identifying where enforceable standards, budget lines and accountability mechanisms are missing, and

embedding these in the revised framework.

Supporting actions:

Protect the deployment investment. Ensure new CHWs enter systems designed to retain them. Align recruitment with employment terms, career pathways and safe working conditions from the outset. Establish protocols for CHW safety, including protection from harassment and violence.

Embed gender in financing. Apply gender-responsive budgeting to primary health care allocations. Track whether resources reach women CHWs, fund safe conditions, and support measures that enable participation across the life course.

Connect data to decisions. Embed equity review within Joint Sector Reviews and district planning. Require disaggregation by sex, age, disability and geography. Where data reveal workforce attrition or coverage gaps among specific populations, ensure that this triggers a response.

Establish cross-sectoral accountability.

Community health intersects Health, Finance, Gender, Education and Local Government among others. Coordination mechanisms with authority to align decisions will accelerate reform.

Ensure adolescent participation in governance.

Include adolescent and young people's representation in community health committees and service design processes. Adolescents who help shape services are more likely to use them, and services shaped by adolescents are more likely to meet their needs.

Invest in younger workforce pathways. Create entry points for young women and men into community health employment. A younger workforce can improve trust with adolescent populations, support intergenerational knowledge transfer, and improve health outcomes.

Align with continental frameworks. Integrate gender-sensitive indicators into national reporting. The African Union Continental Framework for Strengthening Community Health Systems and the Community Health Delivery Partnership provide structures for benchmarking and peer learning.

THE PATH FORWARD



Africa's demographic trajectory demands a health system that can respond. By 2030, the continent will have the world's largest working-age population. A younger generation is entering the workforce and the health system simultaneously: as potential CHWs and as a population underserved by current service models. Community health systems designed with gender-intentional approaches can respond to this shift. They can provide employment pathways for women and young people. They can retain a skilled workforce. They can deliver services that reach women, men, girls and boys with quality care appropriate to their needs. They can strengthen trust between communities and the systems that serve them.

Integrated primary health care is built on a commitment to equity: that all people can access the services they need, when and where they need them. Community health systems are how that commitment is realised. Gender-intentional reform is what ensures community health systems function: that the workforce is retained and protected, that services respond to the distinct needs of women, men, girls and boys, and that the communities

served have voice in how care is delivered. Without gender-intentional community health, primary health care cannot deliver on its promise.

The 2017 African Union Decision established the continental commitment. The 2022 CHW partnership is mobilising resources and implementation is underway. This Review enables governments to assess their community health policies and strategies against the five policy levers, identify where intent has not yet been translated into institutional requirements, and plan for costed, accountable implementation.

Policy intent is the starting point. Implementation means CHWs are integrated into government payroll with contracts, remuneration and occupational protections. It means budget allocations are tracked through gender-intentional tagging. It means community health committees have representative

membership and authority to shape district planning. It means service packages respond to the distinct needs of women, men, girls, boys, and younger and older adolescents. It means data disaggregated by sex, age, disability and geography, connected to Joint Sector Reviews and planning cycles.

Liberia, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Ghana offer practical examples of what institutionalisation requires. The Review provides a framework for other countries to assess their own policies and plan accordingly. The work is underway. The next five years will determine whether community health delivers on the promise African leaders made, or whether that promise remains unfulfilled.

Source: UNICEF (2025). Gender Analytical Review of National Community Health Policies and Strategies. Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office, in collaboration with West and Central Africa and Middle East and North Africa Regional Offices.

For every child

Whoever she is.

Wherever he lives.

Every child deserves a childhood.

A future.

A fair chance.

That's why UNICEF is there.

For each and every child.

Working day in and day out.

In more than 190 countries and territories.

Reaching the hardest to reach.

The furthest from help.

The most excluded.

It's why we stay to the end.

And never give up.

Artificial Intelligence and Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation

This brief explores how generative AI is creating new threats to children's right to protection from sexual abuse and exploitation. It examines emerging risks and evidence and outlines urgent priorities for action.

KEY MESSAGES

1. The growing prevalence of AI-powered image or video generation tools that produce child sexual abuse material marks a significant escalation in risks to children through digital technologies.

3. Urgent action is needed by governments and industry to prevent the creation and spread of AI-generated sexual content of children.

2. Parents, educators, social services, mental health professionals, and law enforcement need resources and continuous training to support impacted children.

The challenge

The rise of powerful AI image generation tools has transformed the risk landscape for child protection. Less than 5 years ago, high-quality generative models were largely proprietary and required significant computing power and expertise.¹ Today, open-source models can run on consumer-grade hardware, making it far easier for perpetrators to create sexual abuse content.²

Even when no ‘real’ child is directly involved, the individual and societal harm is real – such content normalises the sexualisation of children, can fuel demand, and victimises children whose likeness is used.³ It also complicates victim identification by making it harder to determine whether an image depicts a real child in urgent need of help, potentially wasting already scarce law enforcement resources and delaying responses to safeguard children.⁴

These developments mark a profound escalation of the risks children face in the digital environment. Perpetrators can create realistic sexual images of a child without their involvement or awareness, meaning that a child can now have their right to protection violated without ever sending a message or even knowing it has happened. Children then face the full weight of the consequences: shame, stigma, moral judgement from peers and adults, social isolation, and long-term emotional harm.

What do we know?

Increased accessibility of AI-powered image or video generation tools has led to an increase in the production and spread of child sexual abuse materials (CSAM). These risks are not hypothetical; they are documented and growing at a rapid pace. For instance, in one month, the UK’s Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) found nearly 14,000 suspected AI-generated images on a single dark-web forum dedicated to child sexual abuse materials, almost a third confirmed as criminal, and the first realistic AI videos of child sexual abuse.⁵ IWF also identified AI CSAM on mainstream platforms.

Beyond content created by adult offenders, AI generated CSAM also includes ‘deep-fake’ nudes created in peer-to-peer contexts, often disproportionately targeting girls. In Korea, for instance, law enforcement reported a ten-fold increase in sexual offenses involving AI and deepfake technologies between 2022 to 2024, with teenagers constituting the majority of the accused.⁶ In the US, Thorn’s survey found that 1 in 10 teens knew of cases where friends or classmates had created synthetic non-consensual intimate images of other children using generative AI tools.⁷

Recent large-scale research by UNICEF, ECPAT and INTERPOL under the [Disrupting Harm project](#)⁸ showed that across 11 countries, at least 1.2 million children reported having had their images manipulated into sexually explicit deepfakes through AI tools in the past year. In some of the countries, this amounts to 1 in 25 children, or the equivalent of one child in a typical classroom.

Children themselves are already deeply aware of this threat: in some of the 11 countries, up to two thirds said they worry that AI could be used to create fake sexual images, though levels of worry vary hugely from one country to another, underscoring the need for contextually adapted awareness and protection measures.

Increasingly, the use of AI-powered image and video generation tools go beyond just creating CSAM. The US-based National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NC-MEC) report how generative AI is linked to various forms of child sexual exploitation, including grooming and extortion.⁹

In summary, these technological developments mean that a child's body, identity, and reputation can be violated remotely, invisibly, and permanently. Furthermore, children can be threatened, blackmailed, or extorted using images that are fabricated, but that nevertheless feel real, carry social credibility, and can follow them for decades.

Key priorities for action

This unprecedented situation poses new challenges for prevention and education, legal frameworks, and response and support services. Current prevention efforts, which often focus on teaching children about online safety and the risks of creating or sharing sexual images, are still important but insufficient when sexual content can be artificially generated.

- [Parents and caregivers](#) need to be informed about AI-enabled sexual exploitation and abuse and have the understanding and capacity to support children who are affected.
- [Schools](#), as frontline environments, should educate students about AI-related risks such as deepfake nudes and 'nudify'/'undress' AI tools, including the significant harm it causes to those affected, encourage reporting of harmful behaviour, and train educators to respond appropriately.¹⁰

- **Social services, mental health professionals, and law enforcement** need resources and continuous training to support impacted children, recognising the unique psychological impacts of AI-generated child sexual abuse materials, including when produced by peers.¹¹
- **Crucially, the threat of AI-generated sexual content requires urgent legislative action.** National criminal laws must be updated and enforced for the digital age.¹² This includes ensuring definitions of CSAM cover AI-generated material, aligning national frameworks with international standards, and guaranteeing remedies for child victims. States should further ensure the availability of a range of criminal, civil and administrative sanctions for legal persons for offences relating to child sexual exploitation and violations of obligations to protect children from such harms.¹³
- Finally, **increased industry action, accountability and transparency are essential.** States should require companies to conduct child rights due diligence, particularly child rights impact assessments.¹⁴ Companies should incorporate robust disclosure on child rights impacts in their regular reporting.¹⁵ Every actor in the AI value chain, from dataset providers to model developers, must embed safety-by-design. This includes pre-release safety testing for open-source models to reduce misuse or illegal use,¹⁶ with emerging standards offering guidance.¹⁷ Industry also has an immeasurable role to play in contributing to the development of solutions to support child rights and well-being in the age of AI, including by contributing to cross-industry initiatives and research efforts.

Endnotes

- 1 Caoilte Ó Ciardha et al., 'AI Generated Child Sexual Abuse Material -- What's the Harm?,' arXiv:2510.02978, preprint, arXiv, October 3, 2025.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid.; UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Guidelines regarding the implementation of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, CRC/C/156, 10 September 2019, para. 63.
- 4 Caoilte Ó Ciardha et al., p. 17.
- 5 IWF, '2024 Update: Understanding the Rapid Evolution of AI-Generated Child Abuse Imagery,' 2024; IWF, 'What has changed in the AI CSAM landscape?,' July 2024; IWF, 'AI becoming 'child sexual abuse machine' adding to 'dangerous' record levels of online abuse, IWF warns,' 16 January 2026.
- 6 'Deepfake, other digital sex crimes by teens nearly double in South Korea in four years,' The Straits Times, 15 September 2025.
- 7 Thorn, 'REPORT: 1 in 10 Minors Say Peers Have Used AI to Generate Nudes of Other Kids,' 14 August 2024.
- 8 The range of prevalence across the 11 countries was 0.4%–4.3%. Population-level estimates were calculated by using post-stratification weights, which calibrate the sample to UN 2024 age population totals, adjusted by survey-estimated child internet-use rates. Disrupting Harm is a multi-country research project about technology-facilitated child sexual abuse, implemented in 25 countries by UNICEF, ECPAT International and INTERPOL between 2019–2026, with funding from Safe Online. In 2025, approximately 11,000 children living in 11 countries were asked questions about AI-generated child sexual abuse through a nationally representative household survey. More data and findings from Disrupting Harm are forthcoming in 2026 and will be published here: <https://safeonline.global/disrupting-harm-2/>
- 9 NCMEC, 'Spike in online crimes against children a "wake-up call",' 4 September 2025.
- 10 See, for example, eSafety Commissioner (Australia), 'Deepfake damage in schools: How AI-generated abuse is disrupting students, families and school communities,' 27 June 2025. See also: Grossman, S., Pfefferkorn, R., & Liu, S, 'AI-Generated Child Sexual Abuse Material: Insights from Educators, Platforms, Law Enforcement, Legislators, and Victims,' Version 1, Stanford Digital Repository, 2025.
- 11 See, for example, Internet Watch Foundation and CEOP Education (UK), 'Child sexual abuse material generated by artificial intelligence: An essential guide for professionals who work with children and young people,' Internet Watch Foundation, 2025.
- 12 United Nations Children's Fund (2022) 'Legislating for the digital age: Global guide on improving legislative frameworks to protect children from online sexual exploitation and abuse' UNICEF, New York (updated version to be released in late 2026).
- 13 Ibid., pp. 106–107.
- 14 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General comment No. 25 (2021) on children's rights in relation to the digital environment, CRC/C/GC/25, 2 March 2021, para. 38. UNICEF has developed a toolbox for businesses with step-by-step guidance on conducting child rights impact assessments in relation to the digital environment. See UNICEF, D-CRIA Toolbox, 2025.
- 15 UNICEF, 'Corporate reporting on child rights in relation to the digital environment: Disclosure recommendations and guidance for business,' 2025.
- 16 See further: UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight, UNICEF Guidance on AI and Children 3.0, UNICEF Innocenti, Florence, December 2025, p. 18.
- 17 Thorn, 'Safety by Design for Generative AI: Preventing Child Sexual Abuse,' 2024.

Acknowledgements

This brief was drafted by Afrooz Kaviani Johnson, UNICEF Global Programme Division, and Daniel Kardefelt Winther and Anisha Bhargava, UNICEF Office of Strategy and Evidence – Innocenti. Thanks are extended to Josianne Galea Baron, UNICEF Global Programme Division for inputs on the draft.

Disclaimer: This is a working document. It has been prepared to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and to stimulate discussion. The text has not been edited to official publication standards and UNICEF accepts no responsibility for errors. The statements in this publication are the views of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the policies or the views of UNICEF. The designations in this publication do not imply an opinion on legal status of any country or territory, or of its authorities, or the delimitation of frontiers.

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Published by

UNICEF Child Protection and Migration Practice, Global Programme Division and UNICEF Office of Strategy and Evidence – Innocenti

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Suggested citation

United Nations Children’s Fund, Artificial Intelligence and Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation, UNICEF, February 2026.

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New frontiers in child labour: Why digital risks demand urgent attention


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01

Why this matters for Ministries of Labour

Digital technologies are reshaping both economies and childhoods in ways that challenge traditional child labour frameworks. While connectivity expands opportunities for learning and expression, it also restructures labour markets and introduces new, often hidden, forms of child labour in relation to the digital environment (or '**digital child labour**' for short).

Such activities are difficult to detect, transnational in nature, and largely absent from national labour statistics and inspection mandates. As the digital landscape evolves, so too must regulatory frameworks and practices to uphold children's rights and ensure responsible business conduct in the digital environment.

The brief offers a rapid overview of emerging risks and priority considerations, prepared for discussion at the Sixth Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour in February 2026.

02

What is 'digital child labour'?

There is currently no internationally agreed legal definition of 'digital child labour.' For the purposes of this brief, it is conceptualised as work or services performed that meet **internationally recognized definitions of child labour**¹ and that are **enabled, organised, mediated, or amplified by the digital environment** (including platforms, apps, networks, algorithms, data systems, or digital payment infrastructures).² This includes cases that fall within the **worst forms of child labour**,³ such as technology-facilitated exploitation, trafficking, or involvement in illicit activities.

At the same time, it is important to distinguish digital activities that constitute **play, creativity, expression, and acceptable forms of work**. In this regard, the concept of 'permitted light work'⁴ above the general minimum age applies to a range of digital activities that children may engage in, provided they do not compromise education, well-being, or rights. Limited guidance currently exists on the point at which acceptable work may reach thresholds for digital child labour and become unacceptable

03

What are emerging 'digital child labour' risk areas?

Robust global data on the scale and scope of these issues is largely absent. However, existing literature points to a diverse set of scenarios that may be associated with 'digital child labour' risk. The table

below provides an exploratory illustration of the range of activities that may constitute child labour and worst forms of child labour under existing international standards, as a prompt for discussion and action.

Example*	Description	Potential child labour risks
Web-based work on commercial digital labour platforms ⁵	Web-based platform work (microtasks/crowdwork) is remote, task-based labour (annotation, transcription, moderation, engagement 'click farms' etc.) mediated by platforms and often governed by automated systems. The number of children who may be active on such platforms is unknown.	Risks of digital child labour emerge in relation to minimum-age breaches, school interference, and hazardous exposure (especially in content-related tasks).
Location-based work on commercial digital labour platforms ⁶	Location-based platform work (e.g. delivery and other app-mediated services) is physically performed but digitally allocated and managed. Much like the case of web-based work, the number of children who may be active on such platforms is unknown.	To the extent that children are involved, this may constitute child labour via minimum-age breaches, hazardous conditions (traffic/night work/pressure), and worst forms where linked with trafficking/forced labour.
Influencer marketing and monetized content creation	Children's images/voices/performances monetised via platforms (ads, sponsorships, affiliate links). Often mediated or organized by parents or caregivers. Includes cases of children's participation in an adults' influencer marketing or content creation (e.g. commercial 'sharenting' /family vlogging) as well as child-led 'kidfluencing'.	May constitute child labour if production schedules driven by brand collaborations and platform incentives create sustained work demands that interfere with schooling, or where exposure/harassment and loss of privacy/dignity are harmful to development (especially for young children with limited ability to refuse participation).
Competitive eSports and livestreaming	Competitive eSports ⁷ and livestreaming involve performance labour, audience cultivation, and monetisation through donations/subscriptions/sponsorships, often alongside intensive training schedules and reputational work. eSports labour can involve precarious working conditions across the ecosystem (players, streamers).	May constitute child labour if the workload is excessive, interferes with education, or becomes harmful (e.g. burnout).
Monetized gameplay and game design	Includes 'playbour' (play + labour) ⁸ and virtual-economy labour including producing in-game value (virtual goods/currency/services) for sale (e.g., gold farming). Also includes the creation of monetisable game content or assets in user-generated platforms (children acting as 'co-developers' / creators).	May shift from play to labour when they involve sustained hours, structured obligations, or exploitation. May constitute child labour where, for example, hours interfere with schooling and where children cannot freely withdraw due to power asymmetries.
Technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation	Includes livestreaming of child sexual abuse, production / distribution of child sexual exploitation material, and financially motivated sexual extortion.	Directly within the scope of worst forms of child labour.
Child trafficking facilitated by digital technologies	Digital technologies used to facilitate recruitment, grooming, advertising and coordination for trafficking into exploitation (sexual exploitation, forced labour, servitude).	Directly within the scope of worst forms of child labour.
Children used in illicit digital activities and children recruited and used in armed conflict via digital technologies	Children may be used in cyber-enabled illicit activities (fraud facilitation, account laundering, hacking, scam operations, distribution of illegal content) or recruited and used in armed conflict or for offline criminal activities (e.g. 'Com networks' ⁹) via digital technologies.	Directly within the scope of worst forms of child labour.

*Non exhaustive list

04

What are the gaps in evidence and action?

4.1

Measurement challenges and knowledge gaps

There is no clear picture of the extent of child exploitation and abuse in relation to the digital environment.

Specifically for digital child labour, data on prevalence are limited. This measurement gap reflects an underlying lack of conceptual clarity about what constitutes digital child labour itself. Because much digital work takes place outside traditional labour market settings, it falls beyond the visibility of systems that would normally detect, regulate, or prevent child labour.

In the absence of agreed operational definitions, robust measurement is not yet possible. Existing child labour measurement frameworks therefore do not systematically capture whether work is digitally mediated. Similarly, current research on digital labour platforms is generally not designed to identify child participation.¹⁰

Certain forms of digital child labour, such as microtasking, may be difficult to measure as ‘hidden’ work may be undertaken by children through shared accounts or without reliable verification of age. Moreover, the digital environment (networks, services, apps, data systems) can increase concealment of the worst forms of child labour, complicating detection and measurement.

There are also limitations in the global representativeness of existing research. One systematic review of livestreaming (e.g. on video

game live-streaming services) as digital labour noted a major finding around the lack of global diversity in current research.¹¹ Moreover, research on influencer marketing-related risks is significantly shaped by high-income country cases and regulatory debates.¹²

4.2

Regulatory and enforcement challenges

Current child labour laws and enforcement practices are typically designed for ‘offline’ contexts with identifiable employers and workplaces.¹³ By contrast, digitally mediated work can be dispersed, home-based and/or facilitated by caregivers, cross-border, and governed by platform systems. Additional challenges arise as digital child labour can be ‘hidden’ within digital value chains and involve multiple actors including platforms, brands, agencies and others – thereby obscuring where responsibility lies. This lack of clarity also generates legal uncertainty for businesses and absence of clear guidance on implementing measures to ensure respect for children’s rights in digital business activities.

Worst forms of child labour involving digital technologies often fall under the remit of justice and child protection stakeholders, which requires strong coordination with labour authorities. The criminalisation of technology-facilitated abuse and exploitation has generally been slow across jurisdictions, hampering consistent responses and the protection of children.

05

Call to action: Building a forward-looking research and policy agenda

5.1

Clarifying concepts for a changing landscape

Digital environments have opened new spaces for children's work – some creative and acceptable,¹⁴ others clearly hazardous and harmful to children's well-being. While poverty and economic vulnerability remain important drivers, digital child labour is also shaped by newer commercial, technological and social dynamics, including platform- and influencer-based economies and the commercialisation of children's digital identities. Because many of these activities are framed as play or participation, they can blur boundaries between acceptable activities, permitted light work, and child labour.

Labour authorities need a clearer understanding of how established child labour standards apply when work is mediated by digital technologies. Greater conceptual clarity will help guide policy choices and prevent both overreach and under-protection.

5.2

Updating existing frameworks for the digital age

Existing child labour frameworks were designed for physical workplaces, not digital ones. Ministries of Labour are uniquely positioned to start bridging this gap and consider whether emerging challenges call for new standards or adjustments to existing ones. This requires asking whether national laws and inspection systems adequately cover digitally mediated work and, if not, what changes are needed to ensure that minimum age standards, prohibitions on hazardous work, and protections against exploitation apply in digital environments.

Establishing clear thresholds is essential, guided by international standards, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and General Comment No. 25 on children's rights in relation to the digital

environment. These frameworks provide a normative foundation to guide enforcement and protect children as work evolves beyond physical settings.

5.3

Strengthening data and research

While the measurement of child labour is a well-established field, the digital dimensions of child labour and related manifestations are not yet clearly defined for measurement purposes. Dedicated measurement tools have yet to be developed to capture these emerging forms. Ministries of Labour have an important role to play in helping to develop operational definitions and taxonomies, and in advancing the data collection tools needed for inclusion in relevant data sources such as surveys and administrative records.

5.4

Promoting coordination across sectors and borders

Given the transnational nature of the digital environment, learning and exchanging across borders are essential. Coordinated approaches that connect labour law with complementary areas, such as consumer protection, advertising standards, online safety, data protection and governance, and platform regulation, can strengthen children's protection. This requires collaboration across sectors, including online safety and technology regulators, justice systems, child protection agencies, and industry. Robust industry engagement can further support a more holistic approach, contributing to a 'smart mix' of voluntary and mandatory measures that foster business respect for child rights¹⁵ and promote a shared understanding of challenges and appropriate solutions.

5.5

Centring children's rights and voices

The way forward must meaningfully include children and young people in research and policy design, consistent with international child rights law.

Endnotes

- 1 Refer to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols, the ILO Minimum Age for Admission to Employment Convention (No. 138) and the universally ratified ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182). While Article 32 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (the right to protection against economic exploitation) is often interpreted as the child's right to protection against child labour, some argue that economic exploitation should be understood as broader than child labour. This is especially relevant in the context of the digital environment where children are exposed to a myriad of economically exploitative practices: Lievens, E, et al. (2019). [“The child's right to protection against economic exploitation in the digital world: Submission to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.”](#) This paper focuses on ‘child labour’ and does not explore the broader concept of ‘economic exploitation’.
- 2 See UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General comment No. 25 (paras. 112–116), which notes that children creating and sharing content may become economic actors in the digital environment, exposing them to risks of exploitation. States parties are urged to review laws and policies to ensure that children are protected against economic, sexual and other forms of exploitation and that their rights with regard to work in the digital environment and related opportunities for remuneration are protected.
- 3 The worst forms of child labour comprise categories set out in Article 3 of ILO Convention No. 182. These entail all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery including the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom, and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict; the commercial sexual exploitation of children; the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in relevant international treaties; and work that, by its nature or circumstances, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.
- 4 Refer Article 7 of ILO Convention No. 138.
- 5 This typology of work is drawn from the ILO's report [“Digital labour platforms and the future of work: Towards decent work in the online world”](#) (2018). While the report focuses on adult workers, it also highlights indirect impacts on children through conditions of parents engaging on commercial digital labour platforms.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Christopher McCutcheon and Michael Hitchens, [“eSport and the Exploitation of Digital Labour,”](#) *Journal of Fandom Studies* 8, no. 1 (2020): 65–81.
- 8 Catherine J Archer and Kate Mirandilla Delmo, [“Children's ‘Playbour’ as Influencers on Social Media: An Investigation into the Legal and Ethical Issues Surrounding Kidfluencers,”](#) *Communication Research and Practice* 11, no. 3 (2025): 401–16.
- 9 National Crime Agency (UK), [“Sadistic Online Harm Groups Putting People at Unprecedented Risk. Warns the NCA,”](#) accessed January 21, 2026.
- 10 [“Digital Labour Platforms and the Future of Work: Towards Decent Work in the Online World | International Labour Organization,”](#) September 20, 2018.
- 11 Jiaru Tang, [“Live-Streamer as Digital Labor: A Systematic Review,”](#) *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity*, n.d.; Daniel R. Clark and Alisa B. Jno-Charles, [“The Child Labor in Social Media: Kidfluencers, Ethics of Care, and Exploitation,”](#) *Journal of Business Ethics* 201, no. 1 (2025): 35–62.
- 12 Francis Rees, [“Famous at Five: Risk Assessing Digital Child Labour,”](#) *Information & Communications Technology Law* 34, no. 3 (2025): 219–40.
- 13 See, for example, van der Hof et al. (2020). [“The child's right to protection against economic exploitation in the digital world.”](#) *International Journal of Children's Rights*, 28(4), 852, recommending a comprehensive review of child labour law to align protection and participation rights with online child work.
- 14 The ‘acceptability’ of children's participation in online environments depends on whether the underlying business models and design practices are rights-respecting and age-appropriate. See further: Lievens, E, et al. (2019). [“The child's right to protection against economic exploitation in the digital world: Submission to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.”](#)
- 15 See further: UNICEF, UN Human Rights (2024) [“Taking a Child Rights-Based Approach to Implementing the UNGPs in the Digital Environment: A contribution to the B-Tech Project.”](#)

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MMM ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE MOTHERS' ROLE AND RIGHTS

From Member Organisations of the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family

Motherhood: A Powerful Form of Informal Learning – Not a Gap in the CV

On 5 February, we hosted a virtual side-event during the **64th session of the UN Commission for Social Development** titled ***Unlocking the Power of Care: Skills, Equity, and Social Transformation***. The discussion explored how unpaid caregiving – particularly parenting – can and should be recognised as valuable work experience that develops transferable skills.



The event provided a comprehensive, evidence-backed exploration of how unpaid care work – predominantly carried out by women – cultivates valuable transferable skills and leadership capacities. It underscored the urgent need to reshape societal and corporate narratives, adopt supportive policies, and implement practical tools that enable caregivers to gain the recognition and opportunities they deserve.

The discussion culminated in a collective call to action: to move beyond the “motherhood penalty” narrative to highlight the “motherhood bonus” – the valuable skills and competencies gained through caregiving; and to integrate care more fully into economic systems and labour market frameworks, thereby contributing to a more equitable, inclusive and sustainable society.

Key takeaways:

- Unpaid caregiving is skilled work that builds essential leadership and workplace competencies.
- Recognition and valuation of caregiving skills can challenge gender stereotypes, foster men's involvement in unpaid care work, and promote gender equality.
- Policies that integrate caregiving into employment frameworks benefit businesses, economies and societies.
- Tools and narratives that empower caregivers to recognise and communicate their skills are critical to change.
- Men's caregiving involvement must be normalised and supported to redistribute unpaid care work.
- Care work must be integrated into economic metrics and labour policies to reflect its true societal value.

Workplace Skills Developed Through Unpaid Caregiving

Percentage of respondents reporting improvement in workplace skills gained through unpaid caregiving experiences, by category.

Caregiving skills

■ HUMANITY ■ PRODUCTIVITY ■ COGNITIVITY

Empathy	49.6%	
Efficiency	38.9	
Tenacity/persistence	33.6	
Prioritizing tasks	29.8	
Patience	27.5	
Teamwork	27.5	
Emotional intelligence	25.2	
Anticipating needs	20.6	
Flexibility	16.0	
Multitasking	15.3	
Project management skills	13.7	
Collaboration	9.9	
Encouraging others	9.9	
Focus	9.9	
Personal resilience	8.4	
Commitment to employer	6.1	
Personal self-care	5.3	
Personal happiness	4.6	

Source: Rutgers Center for Women in Business, Rutgers Business School survey of 131 caregivers between April and May 2023.



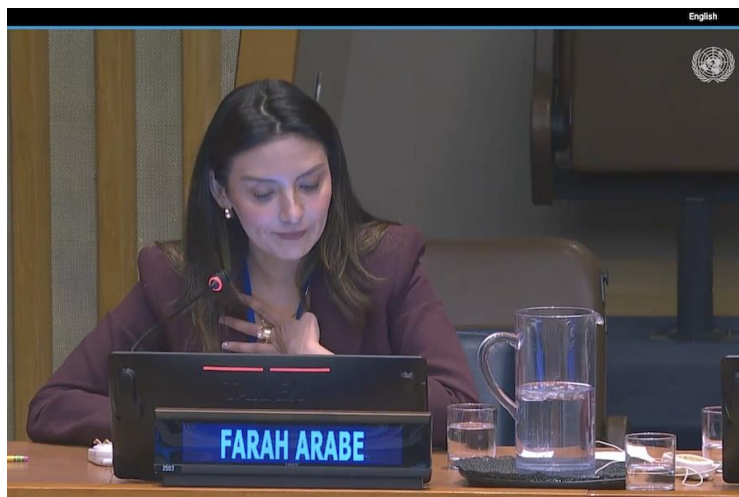
- A multi-stakeholder approach involving individuals, employers, governments and civil society is essential for systemic change.

🔗 Access the *recording* of the event, as well as a *full report* on the [MMM website](#).

Care: The Invisible Force Shaping Society

Also at the **64th session of the UN Commission for Social Development**, **Farah Arabe**, **MMM Board member and UN representative in New York**, was invited to contribute to the Commission's high-level panel discussion on emerging issues, which took place on 4 February and focused on *Eradicating poverty and ensuring dignity through resilient care and support systems*.

In a powerful intervention, she urged Member States to prioritise investment in care and to develop comprehensive, coordinated care systems. *"Investing in care is not only about supporting caregivers", she emphasised. "It is about shaping who children become, defining how societies treat vulnerability, and determining what future generations inherit. When we fail to invest, the costs do not disappear – they build up quietly, unevenly and across generations."*



Her **three core messages** were clear:

- **Caregiving is a foundational public good** – one that generates far-reaching economic, social and intergenerational returns.
- **The care deficit is systemic, not individual**, and disproportionately borne by women – especially mothers.
- **Investing in comprehensive care and support systems is among the most strategic and cost-effective choices governments can make** to advance gender equality, social inclusion, dignity and long-term human flourishing.

"If we aspire not merely to human development, but to human flourishing, care must sit at the centre of social development strategies. [...] If social development is about people, then mothers are its foundation – and strong care systems are how we sustain and protect that foundation."

🔗 See the [MMM article](#) to read her *full speech* and watch her *intervention* on UN WebTV.

Parental Leave: A Global Imperative for Gender Equity and Economic Prosperity

At the event MMM organised on the margins of the **70th UN Commission on the Status of Women** under the title ***Parental Leave in Law and Practice***, experts and policy-makers converged to argue that parental leave is far more than a workplace benefit – it is a critical investment in public health, economic stability and social justice.

The conversation moved beyond the existence of legislation to examine the lived realities of families worldwide, positioning parental leave as a cornerstone for global development and gender equity.

Opening the session, **MMM Board Member Farah Arabe** emphasised that parental leave is a critical legal tool for redistributing care responsibilities more equitably.

However, as **Commissioner Aissata M.B. Camara** of **New York City** underscored, policy alone is not enough. NYC, an early adopter of paid leave for municipal employees in 2016, demonstrates that governments must lead by example.

As Camara highlighted, **three key lessons** emerge:

- Implementation requires coordinated outreach.
- Culture matters as much as legislation.
- Equity demands targeted efforts to reach the most vulnerable.

“Cities turn commitment into action,” Camara noted, stressing the role of local governance in making policies effective.

A public health imperative

Dr. Elizabeth Werner of **Columbia University** outlined the significant health implications of parental leave policies. She highlighted that untreated perinatal mood and anxiety disorders (PMADs) affect up to 26% of birthing people globally, with an estimated annual economic cost of \$14 billion in the United States alone. Paid parental leave has proven to be a powerful mitigating factor – reducing maternal mental health risks, supporting breastfeeding, and improving infant health outcomes. Werner emphasised that such policies are among the rare interventions with multigenerational benefits, strengthening both family well-being and long-term economic stability.

Persistent global gaps

Despite clear evidence of benefits, major disparities persist worldwide. **Julia Braunmiller** of the **World Bank** presented findings from the [2026 Women, Business and the Law report](#), revealing that no country has yet achieved full legal equality between women and men. While 123 countries meet International Labour Organisation standards for maternity leave, only 62 offer paid paternity leave. This imbalance reinforces unequal caregiving roles and limits women’s participation in the workforce. Evidence shows that aligning parental leave policies between mothers and fathers directly contributes to higher female labour force participation.

The culture barrier

Legal reforms alone are insufficient without addressing entrenched social norms. **Jose Campi Portaluppi** of **Equimundo** described the “manbox” – rigid expectations of masculinity that discourage men from taking parental leave due to stigma. Shifting these norms requires both cultural and narrative change, including greater recognition of men’s role as caregivers.

Sarah Steinberg of **LinkedIn** reinforced this point, noting that on LinkedIn, women are 30% more likely than men to report career breaks for caregiving, contributing to long-term earnings gaps and underrepresentation in leadership.

Towards integrated care systems

Closing the panel, **Valentina Perrotta** of **Uruguay’s Ministry of Social Development** emphasised the importance of embedding parental leave within comprehensive national care systems. Uruguay’s approach – treating care as a public good – offers a model for integrating policy, services and cultural change.

A call to action

The discussion made one point unequivocally clear: supporting parents is not a societal cost – it is a foundational investment in the future workforce and in sustainable development.

Achieving true equity will require coordinated action across sectors to:

- expand access to parental leave, including for informal workers;
- ensure adequate compensation;
- address persistent cultural stigmas.

Only through this holistic approach can parental leave fulfil its transformative potential.

👉 See additional information on the [MMM website](#) and read the full report of the event [here](#).

Tackling Child Poverty Means Supporting Parents: Olivier de Schutter's Call to Action in the EU

The **United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Olivier De Schutter**, has submitted his updated contribution to the [European Commission's consultation on the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy](#), calling for a stronger human-rights approach to tackling poverty that reaches those most affected, among them, single parents, mothers and children across Europe.

Building on his previous statement of October 2024, De Schutter identified **six key areas for action**:

1. **Effective participation** of people in poverty as an opportunity to co-design solutions
2. Expanding **access to social services**
3. Securing **adequate funding** of social services
4. Strengthening the [European Child Guarantee](#)
5. **Social mainstreaming**: assessing impacts on poverty and inequalities across all EU policies
6. Reinforcing **national anti-poverty** strategies grounded in human rights

Across the European Union, more than 94 million people remain at risk of poverty or social exclusion. For De Schutter, this is not an accident of economics but the result of choices. He argues that poverty must be addressed through rights-based policies such as fair wages, adequate social protection, and access to quality services, and through the participation of those living the reality of deprivation.

Breaking the cycle of child poverty and supporting parents

The persistence of **child poverty** in Europe is, as De Schutter notes, **"both morally unjustifiable and economically irresponsible"**. He highlights how certain policies can deepen inequality, such as in Finland, where limiting access to early childhood education for children of unemployed parents or those on maternity, paternity, or parental leave was found discriminatory. These families, often **single parent households led by women**, are precisely those most in need of support.

De Schutter highlights the [European Child Guarantee](#) as an **opportunity to change this reality for families, especially single-parent households and those in precarious work, by ensuring free, high-quality early education and care**. He stresses that poverty must also be tackled through better employment conditions and predictable work schedules, since instability directly harms children's development and family life.

De Schutter warns that **fiscal rules must not limit investment in social protection, reminding** the EU that social spending is an investment in the future, not a cost to be cut. Adequate and affordable support for families is a cornerstone of parents' and children's well-being and rights. This vision aligns with MMM's call to place care work and the lived realities of mothers and their families at the heart of policy-making.

🔗 Access the *full article* [here](#).

Rebuilding the Modern Village: Mothers, Children and Older Generations in Mutual Care

MMM submitted its recommendations to the European Commission's initiative on [intergenerational fairness](#), aiming to ensure that today's decisions do not compromise the well-being of future generations. The initiative emphasises the importance of fostering **solidarity and engagement across all ages** and highlights the urgent need to address pressing challenges, including climate change, economic pressures and demographic shifts, while ensuring that **no generation is left behind**.

MMM welcomes the approach of incorporating a **wide range of perspectives**, these include areas such as Agriculture and Rural Development, Budget, Business and Industry, Climate Action, Consumers, Culture and Media, Education and Training, Employment and Social Affairs, Energy, Environment, Justice and Fundamental Rights, Public Health, Research and Innovation, Sport, Statistics, Taxation, and Youth. While MMM focused its recommendations on a subset of these sectors, it recognises that **all these areas affect mothers and families in one way or another**, and that an intergenerational approach must take these interconnections into account.

By emphasising the link between sectoral policies and maternal well-being, MMM seeks to demonstrate how **targeted interventions can support mothers, families and future generations**, contributing to a more cohesive, resilient and fair society.

MMM stresses that **deeply rooted gender stereotypes and insufficient family-supportive policies** still prevent many parents, and especially mothers, from reconciling care duties with their professional aspirations.

Although an increasing number of fathers take advantage of paternity or parental leave, women still shoulder most unpaid care and domestic tasks, reinforcing wider inequalities such as the gender pay gap and women's greater exposure to poverty.

The recent **MMM European survey** of almost 10,000 mothers in Europe showed us the following numbers:

- **23%** of mothers **reduced** their **working hours**.
- **55%** of mothers **changed** their **working status** after having a child.
- **35%** of mothers reported benefiting from a **gradual return to work**.
- **46%** benefited from **adapted working hours**.
- Just **27%** have access to **teleworking options**.
- **27%** of mothers stated **motherhood negatively impacted their careers**.
- At least **63%** of **household and caregiving** tasks are handled by **mothers alone (and up to 70%)**, regardless of their employment status.
- **25%** of fathers **took no paternity leave**.

Families often choose grandparents due to lack of other options, **financial constraints**, and the need for **trustworthy caregivers**. Having raised children themselves, grandparents are often seen as naturally qualified. Their involvement, which should be based on a voluntary basis, also fosters **intergenerational bonds**. On the other hand, **retirement can bring loneliness and boredom**, affecting older people's physical and mental health. Encouraging older adults to stay active, like being engaged grandparents, **helps prevent isolation** and provides them with a **meaningful role**. This **intergenerational bond holds society together** and enables the **transmission of knowledge and values**.

Formal early childhood education and care services, as well as other support services provided by the welfare state, are essential for helping parents balance work, family and personal life. However, when possible, grandparents, biological or not, can also play an important supportive role for parents with young children, particularly mothers seeking to re-enter the labour market.

It is important, though, that such involvement remains voluntary and complementary, not a substitute for the care responsibilities or parental leave that should be equally taken by fathers.

Altogether, these connections foster social cohesion and community solidarity, rebuilding in a modern way the "village" of mutual support and care that so many families long for.

🔗 Access MMM's *full contribution* [here](#).

Berlin Hosts Closing Event of MothersCan – Care, Career, Change

The official closing event of the Erasmus+ project [MothersCan](#) took place at the historic **Biesdorf Palace** in Berlin. Hosted by **Olga Gauks**, Member of the **Berlin House of Representatives**, the event brought together representatives from politics, business and education, and engaged mothers to celebrate and discuss the project's achievements. **MMM** presented the German findings of its [2024 State of Motherhood in Europe survey](#).

In her welcome address, **Olga Gauks** highlighted the importance of equal opportunities for mothers and access to continuing professional education, emphasizing MothersCan's goal: to provide mothers with the resources and networks to develop their professional and personal potential.

Prof. Dr. Bernhard Beckmann, Europäisches Bildungswerk für Beruf und Gesellschaft gGmbH (EBG), and **Theodor Grassos**, Secretary General, European Association of Institutes for Vocational Training (EVBB), underlined the project's **international dimension** and its contribution to more **inclusive education policies**.

Thomas Zimmermann and **Daniela Baum** (Plan B gGmbH) presented an in-depth look at the project's phases and achievements, with a particular focus on its **positive impact on mothers' professional integration** and the creation of training opportunities tailored to their needs.

A highlight of the event was the presentation of the **mothers' survey by Make Mothers Matter**, which showcased the challenges mothers face in balancing work and family life in Germany. **Johanna Schima**, MMM's head of EU Delegation, highlighted the findings which reveal that **German mothers** report some of the highest rates of mental health challenges across the 12 countries surveyed.

Some key German figures

- **26%** of mothers report **depression** (EU average: 20%).
- **46%** feel **mentally overloaded**.
- **68%** change their employment status after having children (EU average: 55%).
- **21%** leave paid work after their first child.
- **44%** feel society **does not value** their role.

MMM's intervention offered recommendations for **employers and policy-makers**, stressing that meaningful change requires stronger support for parents, including longer, better-paid parental leave and flexible working rights.

The event's panel discussion featured **Martha Kauffmann**, entrepreneur, Mali Berlin gGmbH, **Dr.-Ing. Diana Tartakowska**, interim management expert and auditor, **Daniela Baum**, project coordinator, and **Johanna Schima**, MMM, who explored the future of vocational education for mothers, highlighting the importance of targeted programmes and **political and workplace measures to support the reconciliation of family and career**.

The event was a resounding success and marked an important step towards a more equitable working world for mothers. The project itself was recognized for its impact, [winning the Die Europa Prize](#), which honours exceptional educational initiatives.

About the MothersCan Project:

The funded ERASMUS+ project [MothersCan](#) aimed to open new perspectives for mothers through targeted vocational training opportunities and to support them in their professional development. Through close collaboration with partners from the education sector, politics and business, the project was able to initiate concrete changes and create a supportive network for working mothers.

Democracy on Hold: The Hidden Penalty for Parliamentarians Who Become Mothers

The European Parliament adopted a [legislative resolution](#) on the amendment of the European Electoral act, **allowing Members to vote in plenary by proxy voting during pregnancy and after giving birth**. The proposal led by the MEP Juan Fernando López Aguilar from the Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO) and originally initiated by Parliament President Roberta Metsola, seeks to ensure parliamentary rules reflect the needs of the elected representatives, so that **no MEP loses her democratic voice during maternity**. Under the proposal, an MEP could delegate their voting to a colleague for up to **three months before the expected birth and six months after**.

"No elected representative should ever have to choose between their vote and their child," said López Aguilar. "Introducing proxy voting for MEPs on maternity leave strengthens democratic representation and ensures that voter's voices continue to be heard."

MMM welcomes this initiative, as it directly addresses one of the structural barriers that working mothers face in politics and beyond. By allowing MEPs to vote via proxy during pregnancy and after giving birth, the Parliament is **helping to prevent discrimination linked to maternity**, ensuring that women do not have to choose between fulfilling their democratic mandate and caring for their child. More broadly, this measure highlights the need to **tackle workplace discrimination against mothers**, promote equal opportunities, and create environments where maternity and caregiving responsibilities are recognised and supported rather than penalised.

Background: maternity leave and voting rules in the EU

Across the European Union, the rules governing maternity leave and voting procedures for parliamentarians differ significantly. The European Parliament, for example, recognises maternity-related absences as legitimate, but its rules still require every vote to be cast in person. A similar pattern appears at national level. Most Member States offer maternity leave to parliamentarians, but few formally protect their voting rights during leave. Only Spain, Greece and Luxembourg have established systems that allow Members to vote in absence, for example through proxy arrangements.

Elsewhere, voting rights during maternity leave often depend on informal practices, such as "pairing" agreements between political groups, which offer no guaranteed protection of a Member's vote.

🔗 Read the *full article* [here](#).

Protect the Ambitions: MEPs Must Safeguard Funding for the EU Child Guarantee

MMM together with its partners of the [EU Alliance for Investing in Children](#), welcomes the recent vote by the **European Parliament's EMPL Committee**, which firmly supports substantial and dedicated funding for the [European Child Guarantee](#) in its **new Report on the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy**. The Committee has backed the Alliance's core demands, including a dedicated €20 billion budget for the Child Guarantee in the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), as well as mandatory national investment targets – at least 5% of ESF+ funding, and 10% in Member States with above-average child poverty – directed towards reducing child poverty. This marks a major step forward and reflects the tireless advocacy of the Alliance members.

The significance is clear. Child poverty remains one of the EU's most entrenched and harmful injustices, affecting more than 19 million children – **one in four – and their families. Between 2019 and 2023, child and family poverty rose by 4.2%**, driven by the cost-of-living crisis, structural inequalities, and the long-term fallout of the pandemic. The consequences are lifelong: poorer educational outcomes, limited employment prospects, worse health, inadequate housing, increased risks to mental well-being, and reduced opportunities for full social participation.

This vote represents a crucial step towards stronger **national policies to fight child and family poverty**. Four years into its implementation and supported by ESF+, the [European Child Guarantee](#) has already delivered tangible progress and helped elevate child and family poverty on political agendas, strengthen coordination across policy sectors, and promote a holistic and intersectional approach to combating poverty and social exclusion.

🔗 Access our latest *joint statement* [here](#).

Compiled by Irina Pálffy-Daun-Seiler, MMM Representative to the United Nations in Vienna, with input from Valérie Bichelmeier, Vice-President and Head of Advocacy at the UN (Switzerland), and Johanna Schima, Vice-President and Head of Advocacy at the EU (Belgium).

Upcoming Events

All upcoming events can be attended digitally. Many events also take place on multiple dates (see <https://waset.org/>).

June

- 22.-23.; Vienna, Austria: 20. International Conference on Diversity and Inclusion
<https://waset.org/diversity-and-inclusion-conference-in-june-2026-in-vienna>
- 22.-23.; Oslo, Norway: 20. International Conference on Gender, Sexuality and Diversity Studies
<https://waset.org/gender-sexuality-and-diversity-studies-conference-in-june-2026-in-oslo>
- 29.30.; London, UK: 20. International Conference on Social Inequality and Class
<https://waset.org/social-inequality-and-class-conference-in-june-2026-in-london>

July

- 23.-24.; Toronto, Canada: 20. International Conference on Feminist Politics and Gender Equality
<https://waset.org/feminist-politics-and-gender-equality-conference-in-july-2026-in-toronto>
- 30.-31.; Zurich, Switzerland: 20. International Conference on Sociology, Gender and Media
<https://waset.org/sociology-gender-and-media-conference-in-july-2026-in-zurich>

August

- 03. – 04.; Vancouver, Canada: 20. International Conference on Family Studies and Human Development
<https://waset.org/family-studies-and-human-development-conference-in-august-2026-in-vancouver>
- 10.-11.; Hamburg, Germany: 20. International Conference on Developmental Psychology and Adolescence
<https://waset.org/developmental-psychology-and-adolescence-conference-in-august-2026-in-hamburg>
- 27.-28.; Zanzibar, Tanzania: 20. International Conference on Domestic and Sexual Violence
<https://waset.org/domestic-and-sexual-violence-conference-in-august-2026-in-zanzibar>

September

- 03.-04.; Malaga, Spain: 20. International Conference on Anthropological and Sociological Sciences
<https://waset.org/anthropological-and-sociological-sciences-conference-in-september-2026-in-malaga>
- 07.-08.; Rome, Italy: 20. International Conference on Refugee Studies and Social Problems
<https://waset.org/refugee-studies-and-social-problems-conference-in-september-2026-in-rome>
- 21.-22.; Lisbon, Portugal: 20. International Conference on Child and Family Studies
<https://waset.org/child-and-family-studies-conference-in-september-2026-in-lisbon>

<i>Impressum</i>

'Families International' is published by:

Vienna NGO Committee on the Family:

Office of the Chairperson:

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