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Dear Readers of 'Families International',

Issue 139 focuses on a variety of topics regarding children, mothers and families.

The first text, an executive summary from UNICEF Innocenti, shows a hopeful outlook on the possibilities regarding the ending of child poverty.

This issue also includes three texts from member organisations of the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family. Two from the International Federation for Family Development (IFFD) on parenting in the digital age and risks of family formation, the third from Make Mothers Matter (MMM), on their take on important findings about - often unnoticed - violence against mothers.

Finally, one can find a list of upcoming events concerning families, children and more at the end.

Sincerely,

Julia Birner B.A., M.Sc.

Executive Editor

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From UNICEF Innocenti

unicef 
for every child

The State of the World's Children 2025

Ending Child Poverty: Our shared imperative

Executive summary

Poverty poisons childhood – and our collective future

It claims children’s lives, undermines their health and development, and constrains their learning. The consequences extend far beyond childhood: Adults who grew up in poverty face weaker job prospects, shorter lives, and higher rates of depression and anxiety.

▼
It is not a question of scarcity or resources – it is a question of priorities.

Poverty also harms societies. By limiting children’s ability to realize their full potential, it undermines future economic prosperity. By dividing the haves from the have-nots, it frays the bonds that tie us together. And by depriving communities of hope, it creates conditions in which violence and extremism can thrive.¹

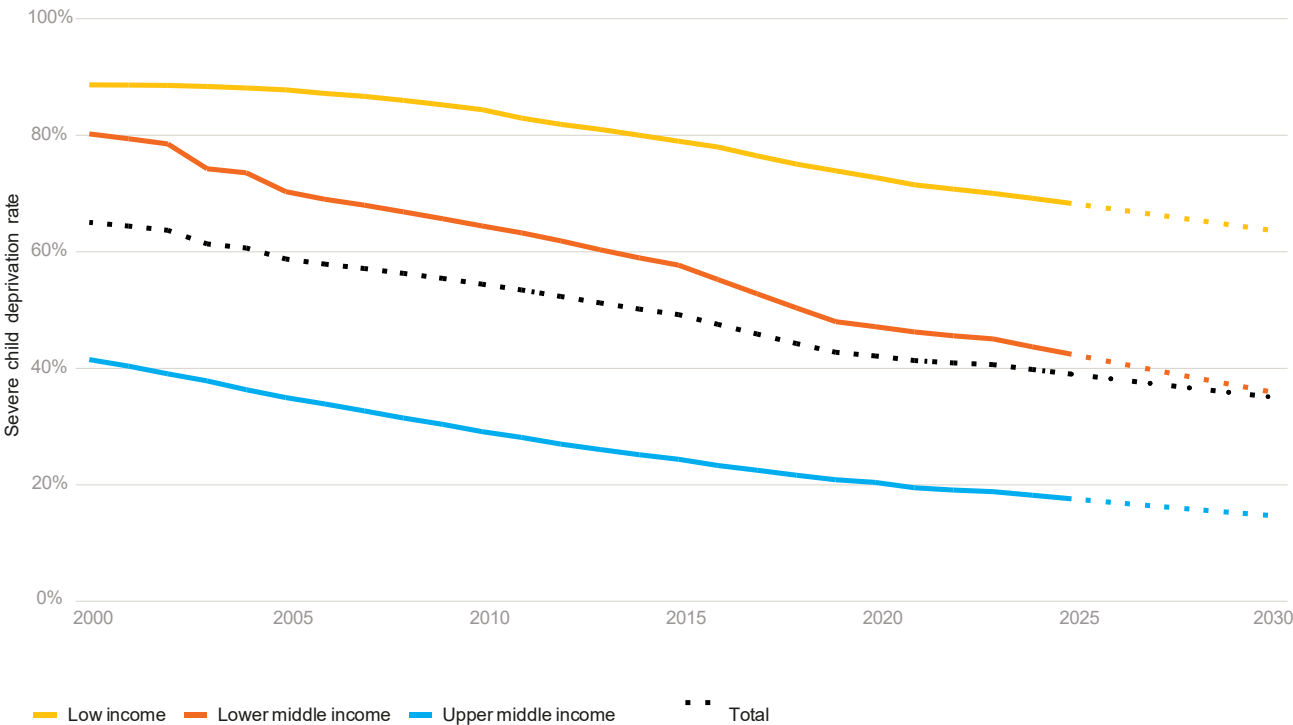
At a time when global military spending has reached a record US\$2.72 trillion,² hundreds of millions of children continue to live in deprivation, lacking basics like schooling, clean water and adequate shelter.

This reality is not a question of scarcity or resources – it is a question of priorities.

Progress is possible

While far too many children still live in poverty, the world has made significant progress. In this century so far, the rate of children living in severe deprivation has fallen by a third, declining from three out of five children in 2000 to two out of five in 2023. (see Figure 1).³

Figure 1 Severe child deprivation rates by income group, historical and projected, 2000–2030



Note: This chart shows the percentage of children aged 0–17 with one or more severe deprivations. Household survey data that serve as the basis for the estimates cover less than 50 per cent of the child population in upper-middle-income countries.

Source: Save the Children estimates of multidimensional poverty rates, 2023 and UNICEF projections for 2024–2030.

The reasons behind these gains are not a mystery: Governments, civil society and the international community took strategic and decisive action. They made ending child poverty a national priority and prioritized child rights. They embedded children's needs into economic planning, provided cash assistance to families, expanded access to essential public services and promoted decent work for parents and caregivers.⁴

The success of these approaches proves that progress is within reach.

Yet momentum has slowed. The COVID-19 pandemic brought progress to a halt, and recovery has been sluggish.⁵ In sub-Saharan Africa, major setbacks began even earlier, with some countries making little or no progress in reducing child poverty since 2014.⁶

Without coordinated action to reverse this slowdown, we risk consigning millions more children to deprivation.⁷ We risk creating an indebted generation – a cohort of children whose futures are compromised as countries struggle to service debt incurred before they were born.⁸

A better future demands action now

The State of the World's Children 2024 demonstrated that three powerful megatrends – demographic shifts, climate and environmental crises, and frontier technologies – will create a world for children in 2050 that is vastly different from today's. Acute crises, such as rising levels of armed conflict and mounting debt burdens, further compound these long-term trends.

Our response to these shifts will determine how far we advance in reducing child poverty. That response cannot wait.

Climate change and conflict threaten to drive ever more families into poverty. Already, four out of five children face at least one extreme climate hazard every year.⁹ In 2024, almost one in five children lived in a conflict area – nearly double the rate in the mid-1990s.¹⁰

Economic growth is slowing in many developing economies, risking their ability to expand anti-poverty programmes and public services for children. Unprecedented cuts in development aid could result in the deaths of at least 4.5 million children under age 5 by 2030 – each one a tragedy for a family and a grave loss of human potential.¹¹ Aid cuts will also limit children's opportunity to learn. Projected to fall by almost a quarter by 2026, aid reductions in education will put 6 million more children at risk of being out of school.¹²

Moreover, inequalities in digital access are increasingly shaping children's access to education, health care and economic opportunity.¹³ Digital technology has become a gateway need: Without it, children cannot access essential services and realize their rights,¹⁴ deepening existing divides.

And then there is debt: 45 of the world's developing countries now pay more on interest than they spend on health, and 22 spend more on interest than education.¹⁵ When countries underinvest in children, it creates a vicious cycle – failing to invest in children weakens economies, which in turn hinders countries' ability to repay debt.

Young people know what is happening. They experience the gap between rhetoric and reality.

“They said the economy was recovering. We didn’t feel it. They said schools were open. Ours were underwater. They said children were resilient. We were exhausted. They said we were the future. We asked: Whose?”

Nahjae Nunes, 2023 United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Youth Foresight Fellow

Child poverty today

Poverty violates children’s fundamental rights. In a world where hundreds of millions of children suffer deprivation, the rights enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child – including rights to education, housing, sanitation and more – are not being fully realized.

Monetary poverty: A crisis of extremes

Today, almost one in five of the world’s children – more than 412 million – live in extreme monetary poverty, surviving on less than \$3.00 per day.¹⁶ Children are more than twice as likely as adults to live in extreme poverty,¹⁷ reflecting higher costs for families raising children. Because their bodies and minds are still developing, children are also more vulnerable to poverty’s effects and face potentially lifelong consequences in terms of their well-being.¹⁸

▼
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Children living in extreme poverty are increasingly concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa, which accounts for more than three out of four of all children who live in extreme poverty, even though the region is home to fewer than one in four of the world’s children.¹⁹ Together, sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia account for almost 9 out of 10 children living in extreme poverty, while representing only about half of the world’s children.²⁰

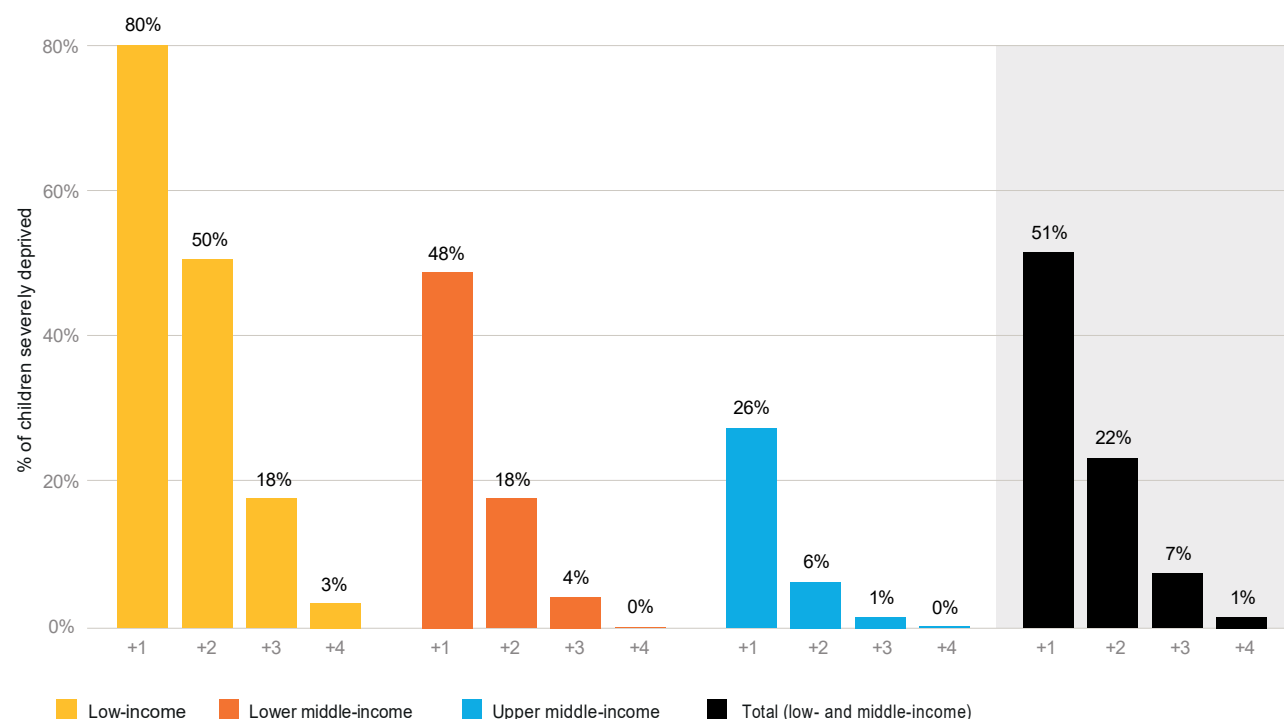
But child poverty is not confined to the world’s poorest regions. Based on a higher poverty threshold in upper-middle-income countries (\$8.30 per day), almost two out of three children globally – 1.4 billion – are living in monetary poverty.²¹

Severe deprivation: The multiple elements of poverty

Monetary measures tell only part of the story. In low- and middle-income countries, more than one in five children (417 million) are severely deprived in two or more of the following areas: education, health, housing, nutrition, sanitation and clean water (*see Figure 2*).²² The highest rates of severe deprivation among children are concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa, with South Asia, East Asia and the Pacific also showing high rates.

So far this century, countries have made progress towards reducing child poverty as measured by severe deprivation. Estimates show that poverty based on severe deprivation in at least one area has fallen by one third since 2000 in low- and middle-income countries.²³

But progress has stalled in wealthy countries in recent years. High-income countries use different indicators to measure severe deprivation among children; data are not directly comparable to those of low- and middle-income countries, although the concept of deprivation is the same. In the European Union (EU), severe deprivation among children declined between 2015 and 2024, but progress occurred only in the first half of the period. More than 6 million children in the region currently live in severe deprivation.

Figure 2 Severe deprivation rates among children, by country income group (based on number of deprivations)

Source: Joint analysis of data from Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) and Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) by Save the Children and UNICEF.

Children at heightened risk

The world's **youngest children** experience the highest rates of poverty. In 2024, 22.3 per cent of children aged 0 to 4 lived in extreme monetary poverty, compared with 14.9 per cent of 15- to 17-year-olds.²⁴

Half of all children living in **fragile and conflict-affected settings** live in extreme poverty, versus 11.4 per cent of children outside of such states.²⁵ **The education background** of the head of household is also a factor: Children face an extreme poverty rate of 32.9 per cent when the head of their household has no education, compared with just 5.8 per cent when the head of household has completed tertiary education.²⁶

Nearly 79 per cent of children facing extreme monetary poverty live in **rural areas** based on available data, though poverty in **urban slums** and informal settlements is much higher than the average in urban areas.²⁷ **Children with disabilities** are far more likely to live in poverty than other children,²⁸ because their families face disproportionately higher health care costs and their parents may be unable to work outside the home due to caregiving duties.

Children who are displaced or refugees, although often undercounted, face heightened poverty risk both in transit and upon arrival. Studies from Colombia, Lebanon and Uganda indicate elevated poverty rates among displaced populations.²⁹ Indigenous children also face substantially higher poverty rates. In the 23 countries that ratified the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 18.7 per cent of indigenous peoples lived in extreme monetary poverty compared with 9.3 per cent of the general population.³⁰



In low- and middle-income countries,
417 million children experience two or more deprivations.

Proven ways to reduce child poverty

Evidence from countries that have made substantial reductions in child poverty points to five core policy areas that, when combined, create lasting impact:

1. **Make ending child poverty a national priority.** Embedding child poverty reduction in laws, plans and budgets transforms it from aspiration into binding obligation.
2. **Create fiscal space and supportive macroeconomic policies.** Reducing child poverty requires children's needs to be embedded into economic and fiscal governance. Central banks should assess how interest rate changes affect families, and legal frameworks should protect child-related spending and include automatic inflation adjustments. Child-sensitive budgeting and transparency mechanisms also support accountability: Countries with more transparent budgets tend to spend more on health care and child well-being.
3. **Expand inclusive social protection.** Both universal and targeted family and child benefits have demonstrably helped reduce child poverty rates, improved nutrition and health, and increased school attendance and completion.³¹ Targeted cash transfer programmes have proven effective in countries including Brazil, Mexico and South Africa, while Poland's universal child benefit has helped drive a substantial reduction in child poverty rates.³² Still, approximately 1.8 billion children globally lack any form of social protection coverage.³³
4. **Expand access to quality public services.** Children need reliable access to education, health care, water, sanitation, nutrition, information, play and housing to support their learning, development and well-being. Indonesia's School Operational Assistance programme has reduced financial burdens on families while increasing enrolment and retention.³⁴ Meanwhile, Bangladesh's integrated maternal and infant nutrition efforts have steadily lowered the country's stunting rates.³⁵ The European Child Guarantee ensures access to free early childhood education and health care, at least one healthy school meal daily, and adequate housing for marginalized children.
5. **Promote decent work.** Children's well-being is closely tied to their caregivers' economic security. Despite low global unemployment, more than 58 per cent of the global workforce were informally employed in 2023.³⁶ In Africa, 29 per cent of working people were living in poverty – more than four times the global rate.³⁷ Practical steps to ensure decent work include legislating and enforcing minimum wages, increasing formalization through incentives, and extending social security to informal workers. Policies must also support workers' care responsibilities through paid parental leave and affordable childcare.

These five pillars require **enabling conditions**: recognizing shared global responsibility, catalysing public support for change, improving data collection and disaggregation, listening to children, and building foresight capacity to prepare for the future.

Three crises threatening progress

Although proven solutions exist, three immediate crises – climate and environmental crises, rising levels of conflict and the funding shortfall – threaten to undermine efforts to reduce child poverty. Alongside long-term megatrends that offer both opportunities and risks, acute crises are harming children now – destroying livelihoods, displacing families, disrupting education, and causing hunger and malnutrition.

The climate and environmental crisis

Each year, four out of five children face at least one extreme climate hazard, such as a heatwave, flood or drought. In 2023, nearly 9 million children were displaced by such disasters.³⁸ Projections for 2050 show that about eight times more children will be exposed to extreme heatwaves, three times more to extreme river floods and nearly twice as many to extreme wildfires.³⁹

In combination, climate hazards and poverty compound each other. Children living in poverty are more likely to be exposed to extreme climate hazards, and these hazards push families deeper into poverty. In 2024, at least one in seven children – 242 million – experienced school disruptions due to climate shocks, leading to learning losses.⁴⁰ Research estimates that climate change effects could force between 32 million and 132 million people into extreme poverty by 2030, with the most affected populations in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.⁴¹

The burden is heaviest in countries least responsible for the climate crisis, and least equipped to adapt.⁴²

Climate-responsive solutions

Through decisive climate action, up to 175 million people could be lifted out of extreme poverty by 2050.⁴³ It involves the following:

- **Expanding shock-responsive social protection in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.** Bangladesh's anticipatory cash transfer programme delivers funds to vulnerable households before floods reach critical levels, allowing families to protect their assets and therefore reducing their anxiety.⁴⁴ Similar national social protection systems can be scaled to provide automatic responses to climate triggers.
- **Supporting displaced children.** As climate-driven displacement increases, countries must strengthen systems to ensure displaced children retain access to education, health care, social protection and legal identity. Countries including Brazil, Morocco and Türkiye have policies that ensure migrant and refugee children can access services, regardless of their status.⁴⁵
- **Enabling community-led solutions.** As an example, in South Sudan's Maban County, community consultations led to locally defined flood preparedness strategies.⁴⁶ These included early warning systems and child-led anticipatory action plans. Children designed evacuation strategies and safe learning spaces, building both practical readiness and emotional resilience.



Acute crises are harming children now. They are destroying livelihoods, displacing families, disrupting education, and causing hunger and malnutrition.

In 2024, at least, **1 in 7** children experience school disruptions from climate shocks, leading to learning losses.

- **Strengthening climate-resilient infrastructure and services.** Governments should invest in early warning systems, rapid response protocols, and climate-adaptive schools and health facilities. For example, European cities like Barcelona, Madrid and Paris have transformed schoolyards into 'cool islands', using trees, gardens and shaded areas to combat urban heat.⁴⁷

Rising levels of conflict

The world is experiencing a historic rise in armed conflict: 2024 and 2025 have seen the highest number of countries engaged in armed conflict since World War II.⁴⁸ In 2024, about 19 per cent of the world's children lived in a conflict area – nearly double the rate in the mid-1990s.⁴⁹

In 2024, the United Nations verified 41,370 grave violations against children in conflict – a 25 per cent surge from 2023.⁵⁰ Denial of humanitarian access, with more than 7,900 verified instances in 2024, puts children at acute risk of abuse, exploitation, disease and famine.⁵¹

▼
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A well-established link exists between monetary poverty and armed conflict.⁵²

Between 2014 and 2024, the extreme child monetary poverty rate in fragile and conflict-affected states rose from 46 per cent to 50.2 per cent, while in all other states it fell from 19.9 per cent to 11.4 per cent.⁵³ This means half of children in fragile and conflict-affected

settings live in extreme poverty, compared to roughly one in nine children in all other states.

Conflict causes poverty by undermining economic stability, destroying infrastructure and disrupting public services like water, education and energy.⁵⁴ Disruptions to education violate children's right to learn and develop, eroding both individual potential and shared prosperity. Countries experiencing repeated or prolonged conflicts accumulate a 'conflict debt' – cumulative, long-term economic damage that stalls poverty reduction.⁵⁵

Protecting children in conflict

Effective strategies combine flexible humanitarian transfers, education continuity and psychosocial support. Governments need to:

- **Ensure humanitarian access and uphold children's rights.** Governments and armed actors must respect international humanitarian law, remove barriers to aid delivery and uphold the best interests of children in all decisions affecting children in conflict zones.
- **Invest in social protection in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.** Provide unconditional cash transfers to vulnerable families, supplemented with in-kind support such as food, shelter and supplies. Where digital infrastructure exists, use it to deliver aid efficiently while linking beneficiaries to mental health services, case management and other essential services. Strengthen social protection systems to ensure sustained delivery.
- **Prioritize education in crisis response.** Treat education as a core component of emergency response by establishing temporary learning spaces, catch-up classes and hybrid learning models. Invest in digital tools, such as solar-powered tablets for remote learning during power outages.
- **Restore essential systems.** Rebuild health, education and civil registration systems quickly to ensure children have the legal identity documents they need to access services. Technology providers can create secure digital platforms for aid delivery, while educators can apply trauma-informed approaches in safe learning spaces.

- **Empower local actors.** Civil society organizations, community leaders and youth groups, which are trusted by communities, are often the first responders. Support them with training, resources and coordination mechanisms to extend outreach through mobile schools and community-based programmes.

The funding crisis and underinvestment in children

Too many governments face an impossible challenge: How to invest adequately in children when funding is scarce. Most low-income countries collect 7–15 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in taxes, but 25–30 per cent is needed to fund universal health care, education and social protection.⁵⁶ Climate adaptation requires roughly 3–3.5 per cent of GDP annually in low-income countries, further pressuring budgets.⁵⁷

International financing has failed to fill the gap. Official development assistance has stagnated in real terms, with the share reaching the least-developed countries falling from one third to under one quarter in a decade.⁵⁸ Meanwhile, foreign direct investment in developing countries has declined sharply after peaking in the early 2000s. The least-developed countries receive less than 5 per cent of foreign direct investment flowing to developing countries, and less than 2 per cent of global flows.⁵⁹

With private investment flowing elsewhere, aid stagnating and domestic revenue covering barely half of basic needs, governments now face a crisis. External debt service consumes around one fifth of government revenue in many low-income countries, often exceeding health and education spending combined.⁶⁰ In Africa, per-capita spending on interest (US\$70) exceeds spending on health (US\$44) or education (US\$63).⁶¹



External debt service consumes around one fifth of government revenue in many low-income countries, often exceeding health and education spending combined.

Structural solutions for sustainable change

Traditional solutions – debt cancellation, increased aid, austerity or borrowing from new sources – have fallen short or deepened the crisis. Instead, debt restructuring is needed to transform obligations into opportunities for governments to make robust, sustainable investments in children. The key is to align incentives around reducing child poverty and enhancing children's well-being. Elements of such a programme would include:

- Linking debt relief to investments in children. Countries would work with creditors to reduce debt payments while improving tax collection. The resulting savings – combined with increased tax revenue – would fund investments in children's nutrition, education, health, and protection from violence and exploitation.
- Providing rapid technical support. International partners would help countries upgrade digital tax systems and strengthen revenue collection, with gains realized within two to three years. As domestic revenue increases, it would be shared between creditors and child-focused programmes, with the majority supporting social investments.
- Creating a sustainable path forward. Countries would graduate from the framework as they meet benchmarks in both revenue capacity and child development outcomes.

This approach creates shared benefits: Governments achieve visible social progress, creditors receive predictable returns and more children escape the grip of poverty.

A question of will

Ending child poverty in the twenty-first century is within our power. We know from both evidence and experience that we can make significant progress quickly, even in economically challenging times. We know which policies and investments accelerate progress. And we have the foresight and experience to lay the groundwork today to meet future challenges.

We also know this is a shared imperative. Economic crises, climate shocks and conflicts know no borders. In a world of plenty, too many children are suffering as poverty strips them of their rights and endangers their futures. And when poverty undermines social cohesion and economic prosperity, we all lose.

So why aren't we achieving more?

In the first-ever edition of *The State of the World's Children* report in 1980, UNICEF Executive Director James P. Grant assessed the extent of global resources and knowledge available to combat child poverty and declared they were sufficient to do the job.

Just like today, we knew then what to do and we had the resources to do it.

“It is not over our capacity to achieve this goal that the question mark now hovers. ...
It is over our wisdom and our will to do so.”

James P. Grant, Former UNICEF Executive Director

The progress the world has made to reduce child poverty since 1980 shows that will was found.

Even amid today's mounting crises, we believe that will to end child poverty can – and must – be found again.

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Editorial note

The following corrections have been made to an earlier version of this Executive Summary:

- On page 1, the following statement "In this century so far, the number of children living in severe deprivation has fallen by a third, declining from three out of five children in 2000 to two out of five in 2023." has been corrected to: "In this century so far, the rate of children living in severe deprivation has fallen by a third, declining from three out of five children in 2000 to two out of five in 2023."
- On page 2, the statement "Unprecedented cuts in development aid could result in the deaths of an estimated 4.5 million children under age 5 by 2030" has been corrected to "Unprecedented cuts in development aid could result in the deaths of at least 4.5 million children under age 5 by 2030"
- On page 3, the statement: "Building on progress made since 2000, the number of children in severe deprivation has decreased by an estimated 10 to 15 per cent since the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals were adopted in 2015." has been corrected to: "So far this century, countries have made progress towards reducing child poverty as measured by severe deprivation. Estimates show that poverty based on severe deprivation in at least one area has fallen by one third since 2000 in low- and middle-income countries."
- On page 5, the figure "1.6 billion children globally lack any form of social protection coverage" has been corrected to 1.8 billion reflecting an age grouping of 0–18 years.
- On page 6, the statement: "The burden is heaviest in countries least equipped to adapt: 40 per cent of people affected by climate disasters live in low-income countries, which contain only 9 per cent of the global population." has been corrected to: "The burden is heaviest in countries least responsible for the climate crisis, and least equipped to adapt."

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From Member Organisations of the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family

Parenting and Digital Age

From global frameworks to concrete tools and practices

1 April 2026



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The intersection of demographic transformation and rapid technological advancement is reshaping family life and care systems worldwide. Declining fertility, ageing, increased migration, and evolving family structures are placing new demands on how parenting and caregiving are organized and supported. At the same time, the expansion of digital technologies is transforming access to information, social services, and support networks [1].

These dynamics converge at the household level, where parenting and caregiving shape key population outcomes across the life course, from early childhood development and educational attainment to mental health, labour participation, and intergenerational cohesion.

In this context, parenting education and caregiving systems are essential components of social infrastructure. Evidence shows that sustained investment in parenting support and early-life interventions leads to measurable improvements in human capital development, social cohesion, and long-term economic resilience [2].

However, policies on parenting, care, digital

“There is growing recognition that the subject of the impact of technology on children’s development deserves to be a core component of parenting education. In this context, parents can be empowered to help to frame their children’s relationship with digital media and discuss online etiquette, empathy, ethics, Internet safety, personal boundaries and how to regulate their own media habits.

United Nations General Assembly, Implementation of the objectives of the International Year of the Family and its follow-up processes: Report of the Secretary-General, A/77/61

Rocio Ramos García Nates, BA
Youth Representative to the United Nations
International Federation for Family Development

inclusion, and social protection remain fragmented limiting their impact.

In the digital age, this fragmentation risks widening inequalities, as unequal access to technology leaves vulnerable families further behind. Global policy frameworks have begun to recognize these challenges. The Pact of the Future [3] promotes inclusive, human-centered approaches to technological governance and social development. Similarly, the Doha Political Declaration [4] highlights population dynamics and family well-being in sustainable development strategies. Complementing these, initiatives such as the Caregiver Forum [5] held in Madrid stress the need for stronger, coordinated care systems. In parallel, the upcoming fifty-ninth session of the Commission on Population and Development, reflects growing recognition of the need to better integrate parenting, technology, and policy. [6]

Building on these developments, this paper adopts a policy-oriented research approach to examine how digital technologies can be leveraged to strengthen parenting and caregiving systems in ways that are inclusive, evidence-based, and aligned with global development agendas.

The central question guiding this analysis is: how can new technologies reinforce parenting and caregiving systems to improve population outcomes while advancing the objectives of sustainable development?

Parenting, Caregiving and Population Outcomes

Parenting and caregiving constitute foundational determinants of population outcomes, shaping individual trajectories from early childhood through adulthood and influencing broader patterns of social and economic development. Growing research across disciplines demonstrates that the quality of parenting and care environments directly affects children's cognitive development, educational attainment, emotional regulation, and long-term health. These outcomes, in turn, aggregate into measurable societal impacts, including labour productivity, social cohesion, and demographic resilience [7].

Investment in parenting support and family-centered care has been consistently associated with positive outcomes.[8]. Such interventions also play a preventive role, reducing the incidence of domestic violence, improving mental health outcomes, and fostering stronger intergenerational relationships.

These dynamics are closely aligned with key Sustainable Development Goals: "As highlighted in the previous report of the Secretary-General, parenting education is a useful tool for achieving many of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets, especially the targets under Goals 3 and 4" [9].

Despite this clear alignment, significant disparities persist. Families in vulnerable situations, particularly those facing poverty, limited access to education, or unstable employment, often lack access to adequate parenting support services. These inequalities are further compounded by disparities in access to digital technologies, which increasingly mediate access to information, services, and opportunities.

Addressing these gaps requires a comprehensive approach that recognizes parenting and caregiving not as isolated social issues, but as cross-cutting policy priorities. Without such integration, the potential of family-centered interventions to improve population outcomes remains underutilized, particularly in contexts where structural inequalities and resource constraints limit their reach and effectiveness.

New Technologies and Parenting: Opportunities and Risks

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has introduced new opportunities to support parenting and caregiving, transforming how families access information, services, and networks. Those with a higher socioeconomic status and those who have children with disabilities rely more on online help, as a complement to other support providers such as extended family, educators and paediatricians." [10]

These innovations offer significant benefits. Digital platforms provide evidence-based, stage-specific information, enhance digital and parental literacy, and empower caregivers to make informed decisions on health, education, and well-being. Online communities can also reduce social isolation, especially for those lacking peer or professional support, making technology an enabler of more inclusive and responsive parenting systems.

However, these opportunities come with risks: "new technologies bring forth new opportunities and challenges for all family members, especially parents and caregivers. While parents influence their children's access to and use of technology to a large extent, surveys indicate that they are finding parenting more difficult,

attributing this to the presence of technology in their children's lives" [11]. The digital divide remains a key barrier, with unequal access to devices, connectivity, and digital skills limiting the reach of these tools, particularly, low-income . marginalized families potentially exacerbating inequalities. Concerns about data privacy, online safety, children's mental health, and the quality and regulation of information further complicate their use.

These challenges underscore the need for comprehensive policy frameworks to ensure equitable and ethical use of technology in parenting support. Safeguarding rights, promoting digital inclusion, and establishing quality standards are essential to maximizing the benefits of technological innovation while minimizing its risks.

Public Policy and International Advocacy

The integration of parenting, caregiving, and digital innovation into coherent policy frameworks requires coordinated action across multiple levels of governance. International organizations, national and regional governments, academia, and civil society all play critical roles in shaping policy responses that address this challenge. Within this ecosystem, global advocacy efforts have been instrumental in elevating the importance of family-centered approaches and promoting the inclusion of parenting and caregiving in broader development agendas.

Global policy frameworks play a key role in guiding these efforts. The Pact of the Future [11] articulates a forward-looking vision that emphasizes inclusive, human-centered technological and social policies, technological and social policies, while strengthening resilience at family and community levels. Similarly, the Doha Political Declaration [12] reinforces population dynamics and family well-being as central to sustainable development. At the regional level, initiatives such as the Global Caregiver Forum [13] held in Madrid, promote the exchange of best practices and coordinated support for caregivers, with a focus on balancing formal and informal care systems.

Civil society organizations play a key role as intermediaries between policy frameworks and implementation. By facilitating dialogue among stakeholders, generating evidence, and promoting best practices, they contribute to bridging gaps between global commitments and local realities. Their work often includes advocating for the integration of family perspectives into national development plans, fostering multisectoral partnerships, and supporting the design and im-

plementation of inclusive programs.

Parenting and the Digital Divide: Evidence-Based Approaches

Addressing the intersection of parenting and the digital divide requires evidence-based strategies that are both inclusive and adaptable to diverse socio-economic contexts. Recent policy discussions and research initiatives have increasingly focused on understanding how digital technologies can be leveraged to support families while ensuring that no one is left behind [14].

Emerging evidence highlights that digital tools can play a significant role in enhancing parenting capacity when designed and implemented effectively [15]. For example, online parenting programs and mobile-based interventions have demonstrated positive impacts [16]. In other contexts, digital platforms have enabled the delivery of parenting education to remote or underserved populations, overcoming geographical and logistical barriers [17]. At the same time, successful initiatives underscore the importance of combining technological solutions with human-centered approaches, including community engagement and culturally sensitive program design.

These insights point to the importance of moving beyond isolated interventions towards comprehensive systems that leverage technology while addressing underlying inequalities. By grounding policy decisions in empirical evidence and practical experience, it is possible to design interventions that maximize impact and promote more equitable outcomes for families.

Towards a Sustainable Future: Integrating Parenting and Technology

Integrating parenting and caregiving with technology is a key pathway for sustainable development and improved population outcomes, but requires coordinated policy, practice, and evidence. This aligns with global frameworks, including the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development [18], the Sustainable Development Goals, and the Pact of the Future, enabling progress in health, education, gender equality, and inequality reduction.

Evidence-based policymaking plays a central role in this process. Robust data and research are needed to assess the effectiveness of interventions, identify best practices, and inform the design of scalable solutions. This includes not only quantitative measures of impact, but also qualitative insights into the lived experiences of families

and caregivers.

To operationalize these principles, several key recommendations can be identified.

1- **Governments** should prioritize the inclusion of digital parenting support within national development strategies, ensuring that such programs are accessible, affordable, and culturally appropriate.

2- **Partnerships** between public institutions, civil society, and the private sector can help expand the reach and sustainability of these initiatives.

3- **Mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation should be strengthened** to track population-level impacts and inform continuous improvement.

Crucially, all efforts must be guided by a commitment to equity, ensuring that technological

advancements contribute to narrowing, rather than widening, existing gaps.

Conclusion

Parenting and caregiving are essential social infrastructure shaping population outcomes. Digital innovation offers opportunities to expand knowledge, support networks, and family capacity, but can also reinforce inequalities if unmanaged. A coherent, evidence-based, policy-oriented approach, guided by global and national frameworks and best-practice sharing, is vital. Bridging parenting and technology requires cross-sector action, research investment, and commitment to equity, placing families at the center to improve outcomes and foster a sustainable, inclusive future.

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Risks of Family Formation

Reshaping policy effectiveness and capacity to raise children

1 May 2026



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Fertility decline has emerged as a defining demographic trend across regions, with an increasing number of countries reaching or falling below replacement-level fertility. According to the World Fertility Report 2024[1], this phenomenon is no longer confined to high-income contexts but is increasingly evident in middle-income countries, reflecting a broader structural transformation in global population dynamics.

Importantly, fertility outcomes cannot be understood solely as expressions of individual preference. A key finding of the report highlights a persistent gap between intended and actual fertility: "In all countries and areas today, some individuals and couples experience unintended pregnancies while others fail to realize their desires for childbearing. In low-fertility countries, individuals and couples tend to have fewer children than they desire and to remain childless more often than intended." [2]

This discrepancy underscores that fertility behaviour is shaped by structural, economic, and institutional constraints that condition the feasibility of family formation.

"Barriers to starting a family are often ultimately the same: economic precarity, gender discrimination, lack of support from partners and communities [...], lack of access to services like affordable childcare or education.

Let's create the circumstances where people who deeply want to experience the joys and rewards of parenting can meet their fertility goals, where they have hope for a better tomorrow that is supportive of their choices and protective of their rights, one where their children, and their children's children, can thrive."

Rocio Ramos García Nates, BA
Youth Representative to the United Nations
International Federation for Family Development

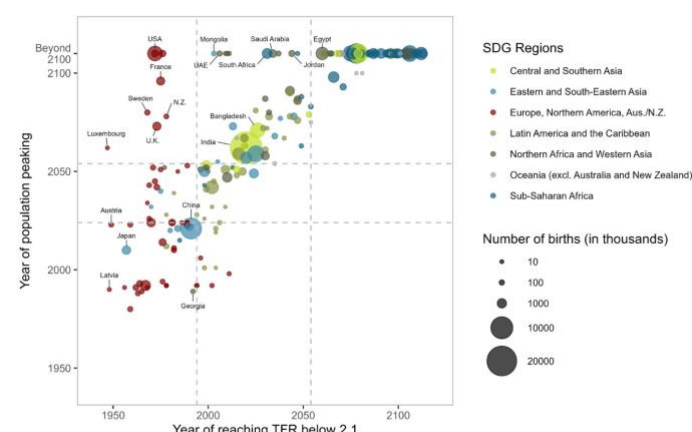
Global Fertility Trends and Population Dynamics

The demographic consequences of sustained low fertility are already observable. The World Fertility Report 2024 states: "Fifty-six countries and areas had reached replacement-level fertility by 1994 [...] Thirty-four of these countries and areas had reached their peak size by 2024, and a further 14 are expected to reach it by 2054."

This reflects a long-term process driven by persistently low fertility rates and shrinking cohorts of women of reproductive age. The report further notes: "In many of these locations, low and very low fertility rates sustained over decades are the major drivers, causing declines in the number of births and, consequently, in the number of women of reproductive age." [3]

Figure 1.

Year of peak population size by year of reaching total fertility below 2.1 births per woman, by region, estimates, 1950–2023, and projections (medium scenario), 2024–2100



Source: United Nations (2024a).

Notes: Countries and areas with at least 90,000 inhabitants in 2024 are represented in the figure. The size of bubbles is according to the number of births in 2024. The regional grouping that comprises Australia and New Zealand has been abbreviated as Aus./N.Z. The country label of New Zealand has been abbreviated as N.Z. The country label of the United Arab Emirates has been abbreviated as UAE. The dashed grey horizontal lines indicate the years 2024 and 2054, respectively. The dashed grey vertical lines indicate the years 1994 and 2054, respectively.

Rather than serving as a descriptive illustration, Figure 1 is analytically central: it demonstrates the temporal sequencing between fertility decline and population peak, showing that population contraction is not a distant scenario but the structural outcome of past fertility behaviour.

This reinforces the argument that fertility decline has cumulative and path-dependent effects, once cohorts shrink, recovery becomes increasingly difficult even if fertility rates stabilize.

At the same time, demographic trajectories remain heterogeneous. While some countries experience population stagnation or decline, others continue to grow due to fertility levels above replacement and/or migration dynamics. This di-

vergence further suggests that fertility outcomes are mediated by institutional and structural contexts rather than following a uniform global pattern.

Care support systems and Fertility Outcomes

The World Fertility Report 2024 also establishes a direct link between balanced care support systems and fertility outcomes: "Gender equality and women's empowerment can help to counter high and low fertility levels." In low-fertility contexts, the report further specifies: "In societies with high levels of women's education and labour market participation, eliminating gender gaps in the division of domestic work and childcare within households, negating persistent gender stereotypes and ensuring adequate public support for families and parenting can facilitate childbearing and help individuals and couples to achieve their desired family size." [4]

Rather than pointing to individual preferences, this evidence suggests that fertility outcomes are closely tied to how care responsibilities are organised within households and supported by institutions. When these arrangements remain unbalanced, the costs of family formation, particularly in terms of time, career continuity, and economic security, become unevenly distributed.

This dynamic has been conceptualised as an incomplete transformation in gender roles. As Frances Goldscheider and colleagues argue, "gender symmetry in family roles has not kept pace with women's increased participation in the public sphere" [5]. In practice, this means that while women's educational and labour market

trajectories have converged with those of men, the private sphere, especially unpaid care work, has adapted more slowly. The result is a persistent asymmetry that makes the transition to parenthood more difficult to sustain.

At the same time, broader structural conditions reinforce these constraints. Under increasing economic and institutional uncertainty, decisions about partnership and childbearing are often postponed. As Melinda Mills and Hans-Peter Blossfeld note, "insecure employment careers and economic uncertainty lead individuals to delay or forego family formation" [6]. This postponement is not simply a matter of preference, but a response to the risks associated with unstable life-course trajectories.

Taken together, these perspectives reinforce a central point: the key issue is not women's participation in education or the labour market, but the extent to which social and institutional structures have adapted to these changes. Where advances in the public sphere are not matched by a more balanced distribution of care responsibilities and adequate policy support, family formation becomes increasingly constrained.

Family Policy: Scope and Limitations

Family policies pursue multiple objectives that extend well beyond demographic outcomes. As noted in the World Fertility Report 2024, "family policies have a diverse set of goals, with only a small share explicitly aimed at increasing fertility rates". These objectives include poverty reduction, labour market participation, and child development, reflecting the broader role of family policy within welfare systems. Within this framework, different policy instruments operate through distinct mechanisms. Financial transfers such as child allowances or tax benefits, are among the most visible tools, yet their impact on fertility remains limited. As the report indicates, they "appear to have a positive but weak effect on fertility" and "can only compensate for a fraction of the costs of childrearing". This aligns with comparative evidence showing that while such measures may influence the timing of births, they rarely lead to sustained increases in completed fertility. [7]

In contrast, policies that address the structural constraints surrounding family life tend to have more consistent effects, highlighting that reducing work-family conflict is a key determinant of fertility behaviour. Olivier Thévenon notes, "policies that facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life appear to be more effective in supporting fertility than those providing only financial incentives" [8] This distinction is critical, as it shifts the focus from short-term economic compensation to long-term institutional design.

In line with this, the World Fertility Report 2024 emphasizes that "the availability of paid maternity and parental leave, flexible employment arrangements and [...] accessible and affordable childcare services [...] have been found to positively affect fertility rates" [9]. These measures do not simply reduce the direct costs of children, but rather transform the conditions under which family formation takes place, lowering opportunity costs, increasing stability, and making parenthood more compatible with employment trajectories.

Taken together, the evidence suggests that the effectiveness of family policy depends less on the volume of resources allocated than on their capacity to reshape the structural environment of care, work, and family life. Policies that address these underlying constraints are more likely to enable individuals and couples to realise their fertility intentions than those focused solely on financial compensation.

Structural Drivers of Family Formation

Work-Life Balance and Care Organisation

Work-family reconciliation emerges as a central determinant of fertility behaviour. Policy frameworks that support parental leave, flexible employment, and childcare provision are essential in reducing the opportunity costs of childbearing. The report emphasizes: "A variety of policies intended to support families and balance family and work life are available [...] including paid parental leave and flexible working arrangements [...] and encouraging an equal distribution of caregiving and household responsibilities between men and women." [10] This highlights that fertility outcomes are closely linked to the social organisation of care. Where care responsibilities remain unevenly distributed, childbearing becomes structurally more costly, particularly for women.

Housing and Family Formation

Housing conditions constitute a critical but often underemphasized determinant of fertility timing. Delayed access to affordable housing contributes to postponement of partnership formation and parenthood, with long-term effects on completed fertility.

Figure 2.

Age-specific fertility rates (ASFR) for selected countries reaching total fertility below 2.1 births per woman between 1995 and 2054, estimates for 1994, and projections (medium scenario), 2024 and 2054

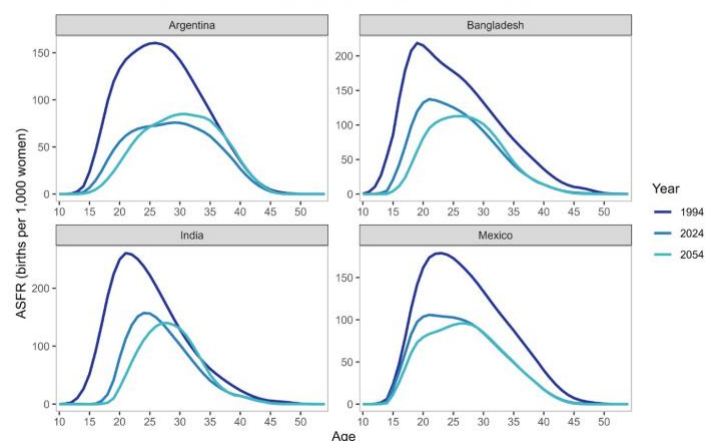


Figure 2 is essential to this argument, as it provides empirical evidence of the postponement of

childbearing to later ages. This shift is not neutral: it leads to a concentration of births within a narrower time frame and increases the likelihood that individuals will not reach their intended number of children due to biological, economic, or partnership constraints.

In this sense, the figure directly illustrates the mechanism behind the fertility gap identified earlier: delayed transitions translate into lower completed fertility, even when initial intentions remain stable.

Parenting Support and Institutional Confidence

Beyond economic constraints, fertility decisions are influenced by perceived capacity to raise children in supportive environments. It is important to have “adequate public support for families and parenting”, including institutional services, community support structures, and accessible parenting resources. Such factors contribute to what may be described as parenting confidence, which plays a significant role in shaping family formation decisions.[11]

Policy Implications: Enabling Family Formation

The World Fertility Report 2024 provides a normative orientation for policy design: “Supportive, needs-based policies can help people to achieve their desired family size.” And further: “Policies should support people to form families and have children when they desire to have them.” [12]

This represents a shift away from demographic target-setting towards a capability-oriented approach, focused on enabling conditions rather than outcomes.

Conclusion: From Fertility Decline to Structural Support for Families

Fertility decline should be understood not as an isolated demographic anomaly, but as the outcome of broader structural transformations in

labour markets, gender relations, housing systems, and welfare institutions. The gap between desired and actual fertility reflects constraints embedded in social organisation rather than a simple change in individual preferences.

From this perspective, fertility outcomes emerge as the product of institutional configurations that structure the feasibility, timing, and perceived risks of family formation. The policy challenge, therefore, is not to influence reproductive intentions directly, but to reshape the conditions under which such intentions can be realised. This requires moving beyond narrowly conceived pronatalist interventions toward a more comprehensive understanding of family policy as an enabling framework—one that addresses work-family reconciliation, access to housing, stability of employment trajectories, and the equitable distribution of care responsibilities.

Crucially, the effectiveness of such policies depends not only on their design, but on their coherence across domains. Measures targeting child-care provision, parental leave, or labour market flexibility are unlikely to generate sustained effects if they are not aligned with broader institutional arrangements governing housing access, income security, and gender norms. In this sense, family policy must be conceived as part of an integrated system of social provision, rather than as a discrete set of instruments aimed at influencing fertility behaviour.

Ultimately, addressing fertility decline through this lens shifts the focus from demographic outcomes to social capability. Enabling individuals and couples to realise their family aspirations is not only a matter of population policy, but a reflection of the extent to which societies are able to provide stable, predictable, and supportive environments across the life course. As such, family policy constitutes not merely a response to demographic change, but a central component of long-term strategies for social cohesion, intergenerational sustainability, and inclusive human development.

[1] World Fertility Report 2024

[2] Idem

[3] State of World Population 2025

[4] World Fertility Report 2024

[5] Goldscheider, F., Bernhardt, E., & Lappegård, T. (2015), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24639356>

[6] Mills, M., & Blossfeld, H.-P. (2013)

[7] World Fertility Report 2024

[8] Thévenon, O. (2011), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1728-4457.2011.00390.x>

[9] World Fertility Report 2024

[10] Idem

[11] Idem

[12] Idem


 Make
Mothers
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MMM ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE MOTHERS' ROLE AND RIGHTS

Landmark UN Report Highlights Violence Against Mothers

The 62nd session of the Human Rights Council, held 15 June to 8 July 2026, discussed the first UN report dedicated exclusively to mothers as right holders. Presented by Reem Alsalem, the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, the report **documents the widespread and systemic violence experienced by women because of their status as mothers**, and calls for comprehensive legal protections and dedicated policies to address this largely invisible phenomenon.

Make Mothers Matter (MMM) warmly welcomes this historic report, to which it contributed alongside eight of its grassroots member organisations.

During the interactive dialogue following the presentation of the report, MMM responded to concerns raised by several Member States by reaffirming that motherhood is one of the many roles women play in society: **“Recognising mothers does not reduce women to a single identity. Rather, it ensures that the realities of motherhood are reflected in laws, policies and institutions that promote gender equality – in the workplace, in public life and across society.”**

Below is a summary of some of the report's [key findings and recommendations](#):

Motherhood remains undervalued and the mother-child bond overlooked

Despite mothers' fundamental role in creating and sustaining life, their specific experiences and needs have largely been absent from international human rights discussions.

As the Special Rapporteur notes: “Motherhood remains largely undervalued and mischaracterised as a purely private choice rather than a public good. Mothers are subjected to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, yet remain unrecognised as a distinct category in law, policy and data.”

The report also highlights the growing marginalisation of the mother-child relationship. At the same time, the erosion of female- and mother-specific language in law and public discourse has weakened the recognition of mothers' rights and protections.

This is particularly evident in situations of armed conflict, where mothers are increasingly targeted, including through reproductive violence, because of their symbolic and practical role in ensuring the future of their communities. Violations of international humanitarian law, together with cuts to humanitarian assistance, have further restricted mothers' and children's access to healthcare, contributing to rising maternal and infant mortality.

Violence against mothers is widespread but often invisible

The report documents the many forms of violence mothers experience, including economic violence through the “motherhood penalty” affecting pay and career progression, as well as obstetric and reproductive violence, physical and sexual abuse, and severe psychological harm.

It also stresses the close relationship between harm inflicted on mothers and harm suffered by their children. The report highlights domestic abuse and child custody proceedings as situations in which perpetrators weaponise the mother-child relationship to maintain control over mothers and continue the abuse.

The report acknowledges that some States have introduced positive measures – including constitutional recognition of motherhood, maternity benefits, financial support, and efforts to address historical injustices such as forced child removals.

However, the Special Rapporteur concludes that these initiatives remain fragmented rather than forming coherent, comprehensive policies.

Mothers have specific rights and needs

She therefore calls on States to recognise mothers as a distinct group with specific rights and needs, to preserve mother-specific language, to strengthen legal and social protections, to prevent reproductive and obstetric violence, and to promote greater societal recognition of motherhood.

In the words of the Special Rapporteur: “The social significance of motherhood should be promoted through education and awareness campaigns. Societal attitudes must shift towards greater recognition and support for mothers and those interested in becoming mothers.”

→ Read the UN Special Rapporteur’s report on violence against mothers (ref. A/HRC/62/49) [here](#).

The Maternal Gap: how systems fail mothers – and what must change

The Special Rapporteur also organised a side-event on 25 June 2026, entitled *The Maternal Gap: How Systems Fail Mothers and What Must Change*, where Valerie Bichelmeier, MMM Vice-President and Head of Advocacy at the UN, was as a speaker.

She explained that mothers face systemic disadvantages that extend far beyond pregnancy and the postnatal period. Employment and social protection systems, she argued, continue to overlook the broader social and economic consequences of motherhood. She highlighted in particular the persistent “motherhood penalty” linked to the disproportionate share of unpaid care work that mothers shoulder – including discrimination, lower earnings, poorer mental health and increased exposure to violence – while noting that these realities remain insufficiently measured and inadequately addressed.

She called for comprehensive reforms, including stronger maternity and caregiving protections, family-friendly workplaces, greater recognition of unpaid care work, and a broader cultural shift towards more equal sharing of caregiving responsibilities. Above all, she stressed the need to ensure that mothers’ experiences are fully reflected in laws, policies and institutions, and placed at the heart of gender equality efforts.

Other speakers addressed the specific challenges faced by migrant mothers and the misuse of child custody proceedings as a form of abuse. Mothers from Palestine and Colombia also delivered powerful and deeply moving testimonies about the violence they have endured.

Motherhood finally on the UN Agenda?

Make Mothers Matter hopes that this landmark UN report marks the beginning of sustained international action to address violence against mothers, and take motherhood into account in women’s rights discussions. By recognising mothers’ specific experiences and ensuring they are reflected in laws, policies and institutions, we can build employment and social protection systems that truly work for mothers and make meaningful progress towards gender equality.

🔗 Read more on the [MMM website](#).

Motherhood at the Heart of Women’s Financial Insecurity in Old Age

The following summarises an event organised by Soroptimist International on 1 July, on the margins of the 62nd session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, in which MMM was invited to speak.

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Globally, women face significantly higher rates of financial insecurity in old age than men. The gender pension gap, which in most countries is much higher than the gender pay gap, is not a consequence of old age itself, but the cumulative result of a lifetime of inequality, discrimination and constrained choices – with motherhood at the heart of this issue.

In 2023, 79.6% of people above pensionable age received a pension (82.6% of men and 77.2% of women). However, these pensions are often inadequate, particularly for women, who are more likely to rely on tax-financed pensions that provide relatively low benefits. In many countries, especially where informal employment is widespread, expanding contributory pension schemes remains a major challenge.

Even across the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, women's pension income is, on average, 25–30% lower than men's. At the same time, women tend to live longer, requiring greater financial resources to sustain them throughout retirement.

The gender pension gap already begins with a woman's first payslip...

→ Closing the gender pay gap is the first step towards closing the pension gap.

However, this is not enough: life transitions and personal choices also impact pensions. For women, motherhood is a life transition that deserves particular attention.

Research by the London School of Economics across 134 countries shows that mothers face a sharp, and often permanent, drop in employment and earnings after childbirth. The same research shows that motherhood accounts for around 80% of the gender earnings gap in high-income countries.

Maternity-related career interruptions, non-chosen part-time employment, informal work, and slower career progression all accumulate over time, resulting in gender pension gaps that are larger than those of childless women and widen with each additional child.

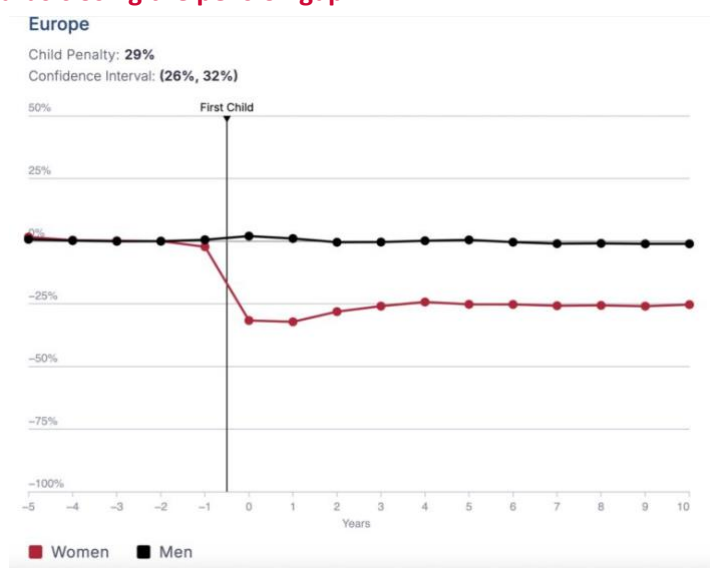


Figure 1: Change in employment after the birth of a child (for men and women in Europe) – Source: LSE Child Penalty Atlas

→ Motherhood – and the unequal distribution of unpaid care work that accompanies it – is at the heart of gender inequality and a major driver of the pension gap.

Care credits, implemented in several European countries to protect pension rights linked to caregiving leave, help reduce contribution gaps. However, they cannot offset lost lifetime earnings; the EU's gender pension gap still averages 25% despite these measures.

True prevention requires affordable childcare, paid parental leave and flexible working arrangements – but also a deeper shift: engaging men, starting with fathers, as equal caregivers. This means addressing gender stereotypes and entrenched social norms. Employers also have a role to play by making caregiving a shared and valued responsibility and by supporting parents and other workers with care responsibilities, both men and women.

→ **Fairly redistributing unpaid care work and caring responsibilities between women and men, and across society, is essential to closing the gender pension gap.**

Alongside the structural reforms needed to reduce the gender pay gap and better recognise care in pension schemes, women must be empowered to strengthen their financial security. In particular, young people must receive better financial education to understand the long-term impact that life transitions and personal decisions can have on their earnings and financial security in old age.

→ **Young women in particular must be empowered through financial literacy to achieve life-long financial independence.**

Financial security in old age is determined decades earlier through choices about education, employment, pay and – above all – who cares for whom. Recognising motherhood and unpaid care as a collective, not private, responsibility is central to gender equality.

🔗 Read the *full article* [here](#).

Why Care Must Shape the Cities of Tomorrow

At the online event *Rethinking Cities Through Care: People, Planet and the 2030 Agenda*, which MMM hosted on the margins of the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), experts and practitioners explored why and how cities can become more caring by prioritising people's needs, human rights, and well-being in policy-making. They also discussed how this approach can advance gender equality, foster child development, and create powerful synergies across sectors and goals to support the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

Why promote Caring Cities?

The unequal distribution of unpaid care work lies at the heart of gender inequality and remains a major driver of economic and social injustice for women, particularly mothers. Recognised under SDG 5, Target 5.4 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the international community has committed to: "Recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure, and social protection policies, and promote shared responsibility within the household and family, as appropriate in each country."

While national policies are essential to advancing this agenda, local governments play a critical role in delivering the public infrastructure and services that support parents and other unpaid caregivers. These include basic services such as water and sanitation, energy, transportation and Internet access, but also social protection, healthcare, housing, care services, parental support and education. Ensuring that these services are sustainable and inclusive also contributes to the achievement of multiple Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) – all of which were under review this year.

In this context, the concept of "Caring Cities" has emerged as a vision for reshaping urban environments through people-centred planning and policy-making. It calls on local governments to prioritise human well-being, equity, environmental sustainability and quality of life alongside economic development. This approach recognises care work – including childcare and care for older persons and persons with disabilities – as fundamental to the functioning of families, communities, societies and economies.

By investing in care-centred public infrastructure and services, cities can better support unpaid caregivers, beginning with mothers, while promoting a more equitable distribution of care responsibilities and costs between women and men, and among families, governments and the private sector.

- Unpaid care work, predominantly performed by women, is foundational to urban functioning and sustainable development but remains undervalued. **Reframing care as a public investment** rather than a private cost is essential to achieving transformative urban futures.
- Building caring cities requires **bottom-up approaches** and participatory definitions of care that prioritise social, ecological and psychological well-being. Policies must also **address time poverty**, enabling caregivers to care for themselves, others and the environment.
- Municipalities should adopt **feminist perspectives** that recognise the gendered nature of care work and its systemic undervaluation. This includes expanding accessible, local care services while promoting more **equitable gender norms** and improving caregivers' quality of life.
- **Early childhood development**, together with the health and well-being of caregivers, should be a central lens for urban planning and policy-making, given the profound influence of caregiving environments on brain development, mental health and community resilience.
- Care policy models built on multi-pillar frameworks and **cross-sector collaboration** offer replicable pathways for embedding care into municipal agendas. These approaches emphasise redistribution, recognition, equity, empowerment and reducing time poverty.
- **Community-based caregiving spaces**, such as mother centres, strengthen social capital and democratic participation, making them valuable municipal investments that contribute to more sustainable and inclusive communities.
- Climate change intensifies caregiving challenges, making **urban climate resilience** inseparable from care resilience. Integrating caregiving needs into climate adaptation plans helps protect maternal health, mental well-being and broader social resilience.
- Caring cities can accelerate **progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals** by integrating care into urban governance, breaking down policy silos, and aligning health, gender, climate and social policies to better support caregivers and communities.
- **Indicators of caring cities** include more inclusive public spaces, stronger community connections, and everyday practices that enhance the visibility and well-being of caregivers. Together, these reflect a deeper cultural and systemic shift rather than superficial interventions.

The growing global momentum behind care-sensitive urban policies depends on stronger alliances across social and environmental agendas. Local governments have a critical role to play as democratic institutions responsible for embedding care into urban planning, legislation and the social contract.

👉 Please see MMM's [look-back website article](#) for the full list of speakers, a detailed report and the recording of the event.

Recognising Mothers' Realities: Key Wins in the New EU Parliament Gender Equality Resolution

The European Parliament has adopted a new resolution calling on the European Commission to deliver an ambitious **2026–2030 Gender Equality Strategy**, centred on concrete legislative and non-legislative actions. The Resolution includes several measures long advocated for by Make Mothers Matter (MMM), marking important progress for mothers across Europe.

Stronger action on women's health and violence prevention

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The EU Parliament calls for strengthened EU action to combat violence against women, including **obstetric violence**, which, as [studies](#) show, affects **between 21% and 81%** of women who have given birth. It also stresses women's right to the **highest standards of physical and mental healthcare**, noting that women disproportionately suffer from depression, anxiety, autoimmune diseases and more severe outcomes in cardiovascular disease.

The Parliament emphasises that gender-sensitive healthcare is essential and urges the Commission to establish **EU-wide standards** for antenatal, childbirth, postnatal and midwifery care.

The Resolution also condemns the practice of surrogacy as reproductive exploitation, especially where vulnerable women are involved.

Addressing the gender pay, employment and pension gaps

Despite progress, the EU gender pay gap remains substantial: women earned **15% less per hour in 2025**, leading to a **26.1% gender pension gap**. Some of the EU Parliament's demands for mothers related to this topic include:

- Binding EU measures to ensure **equal pay for work of equal value**;
- **Gender-neutral job evaluation** tools to properly value work in female-dominated sectors;
- Policies supporting women returning to work after maternity or caregiving breaks, including **reskilling, upskilling, flexible employment and anti-discrimination measures**;
- Legislation on **teleworking** and the **Right to Disconnect**, designed to avoid worsening gender inequalities.

Importantly, the resolution urges Member States to tackle the **"motherhood penalty"** and develop plans to address the **gender pension gap**, including **improved childcare access** and **financial literacy** support for women.

Recognising and redistributing care work

Around **7.7 million women** in the EU are kept out of the labour market due to unpaid caregiving duties. The Parliament's resolution stresses that care must be recognised as a public good and properly supported.

The Parliament calls on the Commission and the Member States to:

- transform the European Care Strategy into a comprehensive **European Care Deal**, with binding legislative and financial tools;
- invest in **accessible, high-quality childcare, after-school programmes, and long-term care services**;
- strengthen the rights and support available for **informal carers**, including financial assistance, pension inclusion, respite, and training;
- improve **working conditions in the care sector**, where most workers are women.

To promote shared responsibilities, the Resolution calls for an **"equal earner – equal carer"** model and stronger promotion of paternity leave.

The Resolution urges the Commission to **review and strengthen the Work-Life Balance Directive to ensure it is fit for purpose, including expanding paid maternity and paternity leave**, across Member States; to promote non-transferable parental leave, and to adopt measures that fairly **redistribute caregiving responsibilities** between households and the state—something MMM has long been advocating for.

Make Mothers Matter welcomes progress

MMM welcomes the inclusion of many long-standing demands related to maternal health, caregiving, work-life balance, and the reduction of inequalities affecting mothers across the EU. The new resolution presents an

opportunity to make structural changes that recognise motherhood, address gendered care responsibilities, and ensure that mothers' rights and well-being are central to Europe's future.

🔗 Read the *full article* [here](#).

🔗 Access the full *EU Parliament resolution* [here](#).

EU Gender Equality Strategy 2026–2030: A Major Step Forward for Mothers and Carers

Make Mothers Matter welcomes the publication of the new **EU Gender Equality Strategy** by the European Commission. The strategy reflects several priorities long advocated for by MMM, particularly the recognition of the structural challenges mothers and carers face when combining work and family life.

A key focus of the Strategy is addressing the persistent **gender pay and pension gaps**. The Commission acknowledges that many women continue to struggle to reconcile professional and private life because they still carry the largest share of unpaid care and household responsibilities. These responsibilities remain one of the main reasons why women work part-time or leave the labour market altogether.

To address this imbalance, the strategy highlights the importance of **flexible working arrangements** and **adequately paid family leave for parents and carers**. Encouraging fathers and male carers to take paternity and parental leave is identified as an essential step towards closing the gender care gap and achieving a more equal sharing of responsibilities within families.

The Strategy also stresses the need to expand access to **high-quality, affordable childcare and long-term care services**. Insufficient care infrastructure in many parts of Europe continues to limit women's participation in the labour market and reinforces existing gender inequalities.

Particular attention is given to mothers and women facing multiple forms of disadvantage. The gender employment gap remains especially pronounced for mothers, as well as for migrant and Roma women, women with disabilities and women living in rural areas. Many women also encounter barriers to career progression due to persistent gender stereotypes, discrimination, career interruptions linked to caregiving and limited access to flexible working arrangements.

MMM also welcomes the strategy's commitment to women's health and well-being. The Commission calls for the highest standards of **physical and mental health** and will launch a **Healthy Workplace Campaign** on mental health at work and the prevention of psychosocial risks, including sexual harassment and violence.

Another important dimension of the Strategy is the recognition that women and girls can be disproportionately affected by crises and emergencies. For example, extreme weather events can create serious health risks for pregnant women and older women, underlining the need for gender-sensitive preparedness and crisis responses.

To further promote a more equal sharing of care responsibilities, the Commission also plans to **tackle persistent stereotypes** that discourage men from taking leave and will strengthen monitoring of men's uptake of family leave through the work-life balance indicator framework.

MMM welcomes this renewed political commitment and looks forward to working with EU institutions and Member States to ensure that these ambitions translate into **concrete progress for mothers, families and societies across Europe**.

🔗 Read the *full article* [here](#).

EU Parliament Anti-Poverty Resolution: A Significant Milestone for Mothers, Families and Children

The European Parliament has adopted its Resolution on a new **EU Anti-Poverty Strategy** for 2025–2026, following joint work by the EMPL and FEMM Committees. This marks a significant political milestone in the fight against poverty and reflects many of the priorities long advocated by MMM.

MMM's contribution has been formally recognised through the explicit citation of its position paper *Mothers' Poverty in the EU*. In addition, shared priorities developed with the Alliance for Investing in Children and the Social Platform have also been incorporated in the text.

Placing families – and mothers – at the heart of the fight against poverty

A major strength of the Resolution is its recognition that **child poverty is closely linked to family poverty**. Without a comprehensive response, poverty risks being persisting across generations – from childhood into adulthood and old age.

To address this, the Resolution promotes a life-cycle approach that supports both children and their families, particularly during early childhood, recognising that these **early years** are critical for **physical, cognitive, social and emotional development, as well as long-term well-being**.

The Resolution also highlights the **heightened risks faced by single-parent families, especially single mothers**, who are significantly more likely to experience poverty than two-parent households. It acknowledges systemic barriers such as income insecurity, housing instability, and limited access to services. Targeted preventive support – including assistance for victims of domestic violence – is therefore essential to break cycles of disadvantage.

Strengthening work-life balance and women's economic security

A key achievement of the Resolution is its strong focus on improving work-life balance and supporting women's economic independence. It calls on Member States to **strengthen maternity, paternity and parental rights**, including guaranteed income during maternity leave, flexible working arrangements, and improved workplace conditions for breastfeeding.

The Resolution also promotes **accessible and adequately paid paternity leave**, recognising its role in encouraging a more equal sharing of care responsibilities.

Additionally, it calls for measures to **support women returning to the labour market after caregiving-related career breaks**. These include “returnship” programmes and the recognition of parental leave periods within pension systems.

More broadly, the Resolution acknowledges the disproportionate impact of **unpaid care work on women and its long-term effect on financial security**, reinforcing the need for structural reform.

Ensuring access to essential services

The Resolution calls for universal access to high-quality, affordable public services, including healthcare, childcare, and social support.

Particular emphasis is placed on:

- prenatal, maternal, neonatal, and paediatric healthcare;
- early childhood education and care.

Mental health is also identified as a critical priority. The Resolution recommends strengthening psychosocial support services for vulnerable families and children, backed by adequate resources and trained professionals.

Preventing family separation and tackling homelessness

A clear message of the Resolution is that **poverty must never justify separating children from their families.** Member States are urged to ensure that financial hardship, housing, issues, or lack of services are not used as grounds for institutional care, which should remain a last resort.

Addressing structural inequalities and intergenerational poverty

The Resolution adopts an intersectional approach, recognising that **poverty both stems from and reinforces discrimination.** Women, children, single parents, informal carers, migrants and other marginalised groups face compounded risks due to structural barriers in labour markets and social protection systems.

A forward-looking framework

For MMM, this Resolution represents a strong validation of sustained advocacy efforts. The next crucial step is to translate these commitments into concrete actions at both EU and national levels, ensuring meaningful change for mothers, families and children across Europe.

👉 Read the *full article* [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/>).

September

- 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>
- 21.-22.; London, United Kingdom: 20. International Conference on Family Studies
<https://waset.org/family-studies-conference-in-september-2026-in-london>
- 21.-22.; London, United Kingdom: 20. International Conference on Family and Human Development
<https://waset.org/family-and-human-development-conference-in-september-2026-in-london>
- 21.-22.; London, United Kingdom: 20. International Conference on Family Studies and Sociological Perspectives
<https://waset.org/family-studies-and-sociological-perspectives-conference-in-september-2026-in-london>

October

- 19.-20.; Barcelona, Spain: 20. International Conference on Marriage and Family Therapy
<https://waset.org/marriage-and-family-therapy-conference-in-october-2026-in-barcelona>
- 19.-20.; Barcelona, Spain: 20. International Conference on Marriage and Family Therapy
<https://waset.org/marriage-and-family-therapy-conference-in-october-2026-in-barcelona>
- 26.-27.; Lisbon, Portugal: 20. International Conference on Children, Women, and Social Studies
<https://waset.org/children-women-and-social-studies-conference-in-october-2026-in-lisbon>

November

- 23.-24.; Paris, France: 20. International Conference on Human Development and Family Studies
<https://waset.org/human-development-and-family-studies-conference-in-november-2026-in-paris>
- 23.-24.; Bangkok, Thailand: 20. International Conference on Children, Women, and Social Studies
<https://waset.org/children-women-and-social-studies-conference-in-november-2026-in-bangkok>

December

- 10.-11.; Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: 20. International Conference on Family Law and Children's Rights
<https://waset.org/family-law-and-childrens-rights-conference-in-december-2026-in-kuala-lumpur>
- 24.-25.; Barcelona, Spain: 20. International Conference on Human Development and Family Studies
<https://waset.org/human-development-and-family-studies-conference-in-december-2026-in-barcelona>
- 30.-31.; Honolulu, United States: 20. International Conference on Human Ecology and Family Sciences
<https://waset.org/human-ecology-and-family-sciences-conference-in-december-2026-in-honolulu>

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