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## *Quarterly Bulletin of the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family*

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Dear Readers of 'Families International',

In this 135th issue of the quarterly bulletin Families International (FI), we begin with a feature from UNICEF Innocenti on why climate security is especially important for children, highlighting the risks they face and actions that can ensure their future well-being.

This is followed by two articles from member organizations of the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family. The first, from the International Federation for Family Development (IFFD), explores how the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can be advanced through family policies and highlights countries that have implemented family responsive legislation.

We are also pleased to include a contribution from Make Mothers Matter (MMM), focusing among other topics on gender equality, Financing for Development and work-life balance.

As always, you will also find at the end of this 135th issue of Families International a list of current and upcoming events relevant to families and family policy.

Sincerely,

Hannah Prüwasser, BA

Executive Editor

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*From UNICEF Innocenti*

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DISCUSSION PAPER

# Why is Climate Security Important for Children?

Cristina Colon and Manasi Nanavati

July 2025

# Executive summary

Climate change is not only an environmental crisis, but also a security crisis with profound implications for children's well-being, national stability, and global peace. Climate security refers to the link between climate change and threats to peace and stability, encompassing how climate-related stressors such as extreme weather events, resource scarcity, and rising sea levels exacerbate conflict and weaken human security. Children, who make up nearly a third of the world's population, face a unique and severe burden from climate insecurity. They experience direct risks through extreme weather events, food and water insecurity, and health crises, while also being impacted indirectly as climate insecurity fuels conflict, displaces families, and weakens critical support systems. Seventy per cent of conflict-affected and fragile countries are highly vulnerable to climate change impacts yet receive only a fraction of the climate finance needed to adapt and build resilience. This discussion paper explores the intersections of climate and security, examines how these compounded risks affect children, and identifies how investing in foresight and preparedness can help protect future generations from climate insecurity risks.

## Climate change pathways to insecurity

Climate change affects security through multiple interconnected pathways that reinforce existing vulnerabilities and create new risks for children. Resource scarcity and competition over water, arable land, and food intensify conflicts in fragile regions, with food price shocks exposing vulnerabilities and increasing grievances among populations. Displacement and migration have surged dramatically, with 117.3 million people forcibly displaced globally as of 2023, and children accounting for 40 per cent of all displaced populations. Economic destabilisation undermines livelihoods, particularly in agriculture-dependent regions, deepening poverty and fuelling grievances that extremist groups exploit. Climate-induced health crises spread disease and increase malnutrition, while political instability grows as governments struggle to respond effectively to climate shocks. Additionally, young environmental advocates face increasing violence, intimidation, and criminalisation, threatening their well-being and security.

## Compounded impacts on children

The intersection of climate change and insecurity creates severe and multifaceted risks for children across several critical areas. Malnutrition and multidimensional poverty increase as climate-related events reduce household incomes, leading to negative coping strategies including reduced food intake, decreased medical care, and increased child labour. Children face heightened exposure to violence, abuse, and exploitation, including recruitment into armed groups, child trafficking, and sexual violence, with displaced populations being particularly vulnerable. Climate-related displacement creates a 'risk caravan' that multiplies dangers and leads to cascading harms to children's safety and well-being:

- Displaced children are significantly more exposed to food insecurity, physical insecurity, and climate hazards
- Two-thirds of countries most affected by climate change also experience conflict and fragility, severely constraining humanitarian access
- Most deaths during conflict result from breakdown of critical systems rather than direct violence, with brutal impacts on children and mothers

## Current responses and knowledge gaps

Achieving climate security requires strengthened coordination across climate, development, humanitarian, disaster risk management, and peace efforts. Current efforts focus on integrating climate action with security and peacekeeping, incorporating conflict-sensitive approaches into climate action, and strengthening climate and conflict sensitivity across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. However, significant knowledge gaps remain, particularly regarding children's rights components in climate security analyses. Research is needed on long-term developmental impacts, children's roles in solutions, dynamics in diverse settings and improved data collection with age, gender, and disability disaggregation:

- Better understanding of how children cope with and adapt to climate insecurity is essential for designing child-centred solutions
- Systematic monitoring of climate-related impacts on children across conflict and non-conflict settings is crucial for improving preparedness
- Strategic foresight can help anticipate future climate and security threats while ensuring children's access to essential services
- Enhanced collaboration between climate, conflict, and child protection experts is needed to build evidence and guide investments

## Recommendations

To address the growing climate security crisis, it is critical to recognize and act on the unique vulnerabilities and rights of children. Key recommendations include:

- Strengthen integration across sectors by aligning climate, humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding efforts—particularly in fragile and conflict-affected areas—and ensuring climate finance reaches children and families on the frontlines.
- Prioritize child participation in global and national climate security policy processes, including COP and peacebuilding forums, by building youth capacity and removing barriers to engagement.
- Improve data and evidence through collaborative research, disaggregated data collection, and tools like UNICEF's CCRI to inform child-focused, conflict-sensitive climate action, and use strategic foresight to anticipate future risks and protect children's rights and access to services.

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# Introduction

Climate change is not only an environmental crisis—it is a security crisis with profound implications for human well-being, national stability, and global peace. As climate change accelerates, its effects intensify existing vulnerabilities, driving conflict, displacement, and economic instability. The concept of climate security has gained increasing attention as policymakers and researchers recognise that the climate crisis does not exist in isolation but interacts with social, political, and economic systems. Particularly concerning is how climate insecurity affects children, a group often overlooked in policy discussions around this topic despite their heightened vulnerability.

Children face direct risks from climate change through extreme weather events, food and water insecurity, and health crises, but they are also impacted indirectly as climate insecurity fuels conflict, displaces families, and weakens critical support systems. This discussion paper is based on insights gleaned from a UNICEF internal working paper entitled *Children and Climate Security* by Shiloh Fetzek and Samantha Cocco-Klein, which explores the intersections of climate and security, how these compounded risks affect children, and how investing in foresight and preparedness can help protect future generations from the risks of climate insecurity.

# What is climate security?

Climate security refers to the link between climate change and threats to peace and stability. It encompasses how climate-related stressors—such as extreme weather events, resource scarcity, and rising sea levels—exacerbate conflict and weaken human security. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), climate security highlights the ways in which climate change intensifies risks to peace, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected settings. This is due to the fragile nature of the governing structures, mechanisms and systems, and the inability of authorities to rapidly respond at scale to populations' humanitarian needs. Seventy per cent of conflict-affected and fragile countries are highly vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change, and these countries receive only a fraction of the climate finance needed to adapt, respond to loss and damage, and build resilience. In recognition of the links between climate, peace and security, COP 28 saw the launch of the landmark Declaration on Climate, Relief, Recovery and Peace calling for 'bolder, collective action' to build climate resilience for children, women and other vulnerable populations in countries and communities facing fragility and conflict.

## Box 1: Key concepts within climate security

- **National Security:** Traditionally focused on military threats, national security now increasingly considers climate-related risks, such as the destabilizing effects of resource scarcity and population displacement.
- **Human Security:** Shifting the focus to individuals, human security includes access to food, water, healthcare, and shelter—all of which are compromised by climate change.
- **Environmental Security:** Recognizing that environmental degradation can drive conflict by worsening resource competition and eroding livelihoods.
- **Environmental Peacebuilding:** Recognizes the crucial role of natural resource management in conflict dynamics. It promotes equitable and collaborative environmental protection and sustainable development as essential to building peace and preventing conflict.

Understanding these interconnections is crucial for developing holistic strategies to address both climate change and its cascading security impacts.



# How does climate change impact security?

Research has linked climate change to the increased risk of insecurity through slow-onset climate trends, such as rising temperatures and altered precipitation patterns, as well as rapid-onset climate-induced disasters.

*Climate change is already intensifying conflict risk, with each additional fraction of a degree in global warming increasing the probability of stressors overwhelming coping capacities.*

Although the evidence on the impacts of disasters on security situations is mixed, some analyses have found a link between climate-induced disasters and the onset of one-third of armed conflicts from 1980–2016. In fact, climate change is already intensifying conflict risk, with each additional fraction of a degree in global warming increasing the probability of stressors overwhelming coping capacities. Climate change affects security through multiple pathways, many of which reinforce existing vulnerabilities. For example:

- **Resource scarcity and conflict:** Climate change reduces access to water, arable land, and food. This intensifies competition over resources, often triggering violence in fragile regions. Food and water insecurity in urban areas is another identified pathway for climate-related insecurity, with sharp increases in food prices linked to urban unrest, including violent protests and riots. Food price shocks can expose vulnerabilities and increase grievances, including among young people, as occurred prior to the Arab Spring.
- **Displacement and migration:** Displacement and migration have surged in recent years, driven largely by conflict and fragility, but also rising disasters linked to climate change. As of 2023, 117.3 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced, and another 281 million had migrated internationally. Children account for 40 per cent of all forcibly displaced people, while weather-related disasters displaced over 30 million people in 2020 alone. Overcrowded urban areas and refugee camps strain infrastructure and can become flashpoints for conflict. Population influxes into densely populated areas, with inadequate services and infrastructure, can be a source of conflict. In addition, perceptions that humanitarian aid is distributed unfairly may lead to tensions, however, humanitarian aid per se does not contribute to conflict.
- **Economic destabilisation:** Climate shocks and stressors undermine livelihoods—particularly in agriculture-dependent regions, deepening poverty and fuelling grievances against governments, which extremist groups can exploit. Climate change has already had dramatic impacts on people's livelihoods in many parts of the world. Reductions in crop yields and other livelihood losses are considered one of the primary pathways linking climate change and insecurity, provoking competition over resources, and resentment

against authorities. In the Sahel, for example, disruptions to grazing patterns have heightened conflicts between farmers and pastoralists.

- **Health crises:** Rising temperatures and altered ecosystems spread disease, while food and water shortages increase malnutrition. In conflict zones, these health crises are magnified by weakened healthcare systems. In addition, the psychological trauma experienced by children is beginning to be further explored, as experiencing climate disasters and conflict cause lasting psychological harm to children, affecting their long-term development.
- **Political instability and repression of young environmental advocates:** As governments struggle to respond to climate shocks, public trust erodes, and social unrest grows. Poor disaster response, such as those seen after the 2022 Pakistan floods, can exacerbate political tensions. At the same time, social movements have responded to climate change with a wide range of activism, and young people have become powerful leaders in activist movements at the local, regional, and global scales. However, in some contexts, youth climate activists face violence, intimidation, harassment, criminalisation and stigmatisation, threatening their well-being and security.

# How does insecurity impact climate change?

Insecurity—whether caused by conflict, weak governance, or economic instability—also worsens climate change's impacts. For example:

- **Conflict increases climate vulnerability:** Conflict often leads to the interruption and breakdown of essential services, which heightens communities' exposure and vulnerability to environmental stresses and shocks. It undermines the ability of societies to adapt to changing climatic conditions by diverting resources, reducing investments in infrastructure and services, and eroding the social capital necessary for building resilience. Additionally, armed conflict frequently contributes to environmental degradation, including deforestation, pollution, and land degradation, while also disrupting the delivery of critical services and weakening efforts aimed at climate adaptation and long-term resilience.
- **Fragile states are highly vulnerable to climate change:** Seventy per cent of fragile and conflict-affected countries are highly vulnerable to climate change, yet they are among the least prepared to cope with its impacts. Due to their fragility, populations in these regions, particularly children, often face high levels of poverty, limited access to essential services such as healthcare and education, and ongoing challenges to their long-term well-being, making them especially susceptible to the compounding effects of both conflict and climate change.

The Declaration on Climate, Relief, Recovery and Peace highlighted the urgency of addressing conflict resilience and adaptation in conflict-affected countries and the need for increased financial support and improved coordination in conflict-affected areas. Priorities include scaling up climate action and integrating climate efforts with humanitarian and peace initiatives, which are necessary for ensuring climate finance, including loss and damage, reaches children and families worst impacted by climate disasters.

## Box 2: Declaration on Climate, Relief, Recovery and Peace

The Declaration on Climate, Relief, Recovery and Peace, launched at COP28 in December 2023 under UAE's Presidency, represents a landmark recognition of the critical links between climate change, conflict, and humanitarian crises. It addresses the urgent funding gap for climate adaptation in fragile states, which historically receive disproportionately low climate finance despite being most vulnerable.

The Declaration has been endorsed by over 90 countries and more than 40 international organizations, including the EU, US, Canada, and major UN agencies. While not legally binding, it has successfully formalized climate-conflict discussions in UN climate conferences and encouraged increased financial pledges for climate resilience in conflict-affected regions.

# What do we know about the compounded impact of climate insecurity on children?

As mentioned above, research highlights multiple pathways linking climate change to insecurity, particularly in fragile contexts. Children, who make up nearly a third of the world's population, face a unique and severe burden from climate insecurity, with several key areas of risk being exacerbated by the intersection of climate change and insecurity.

- **Malnutrition and multidimensional poverty:** Climate change, conflict, and insecurity increase the risk of malnutrition among children. Climate-related events reduce household incomes, leading to negative coping strategies such as reduced food intake, decreased medical care, and increased child labour. Research also demonstrates that conflict and insecurity increase the risk of malnutrition and hunger-related mortality. A recent study of multidimensional child poverty in sub-Saharan Africa found that exposure to extreme climate events measurably increased the likelihood of experiencing poverty.
- **Exposure to violence, abuse, and exploitation:** Climate change and natural hazards can lead to increased violence, including recruitment into armed groups, child trafficking, and sexual violence. Children in displaced populations are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. As climate pressures increase, children may face increased threats from conflict actors and criminal opportunists. In the Lake Chad region, for example, youth facing economic hardship have been recruited into Boko Haram. Young people are central to recruitment efforts and large youth cohorts are associated in some circumstances with increased risk of armed conflict. In addition, one in eight children live in an area where child recruitment occurs. Evidence of a connection between child recruitment and climate change has also been found in Ethiopia, Myanmar, Somalia and Syria. Girls also face the additional risk of early and forced marriage—particularly of girls at young ages—and increased vulnerability to human trafficking and sexual violence.
- **Disruption of services:** Most deaths during conflict are not due to direct violence but instead are due to the breakdown of critical systems for water, sanitation, food and health, with brutal impacts on children and mothers. Both conflict and climate-induced disasters increase exposure to water-borne diseases, particularly cholera and diarrhoea, as well as respiratory and vector-borne diseases. At the same time, the displacement of health staff and destruction of health facilities undermines the prevention, detection and treatment of disease. Climate change impacts essential services such as education and healthcare. Strained education services can lead to renewed conflict risks and exacerbate existing inequalities. In fact, UNICEF has reported that 37 million children were displaced by climate shocks in 2021, with many unable to continue their education. Additionally, climate-related health risks—malnutrition, heat stress, and infectious diseases—disproportionately affect children due to their developing immune systems and during times of severe weather healthcare services are strained or not available.

*Displacement has been described as a 'risk caravan' that multiplies risk and can lead to cascading harms to children's safety and well-being.*

- **Displacement:** Climate change, conflict and displacement are increasingly interlinked. In 2022, 70 per cent of refugees and 80 per cent of displaced people left climate-vulnerable countries. Climate-related disasters and environmental degradation drive displacement. Displacement further strains resources in less-affected areas and can create conflict with host communities. Displacement has been described as a 'risk caravan' that multiplies risk and can lead to cascading harms to children's safety and well-being. Displaced children are significantly more exposed to the risks of food insecurity, physical insecurity and climate hazards.
- **Humanitarian access:** With two-thirds of the countries most affected by climate change also experiencing conflict and fragility, humanitarian access is a growing concern for children. Restrictions on access, interference in aid operations, and violence against humanitarian responders hinder the delivery of essential assistance. The major famines of the 20th century were due initially to drought and floods but exacerbated by conflict. Alarmingly, the same pattern is re-emerging, with humanitarian access severely constrained by conflict in countries with high exposure to climate shocks and young populations, including Sudan, Somalia, Burkina Faso and Myanmar.

# Knowledge gaps: what more do we need to understand?

Despite growing recognition of climate security challenges, significant knowledge gaps remain especially as relates to children since a children's rights component remains missing from most climate security analyses, and climate security is often missing from children's rights analyses. There is a small but growing body of research examining climate impacts, security dynamics, and how these may affect youth, or how youth populations can interact with drivers of fragility or instability, for example around youth populations and recruitment into armed groups. But when it comes to climate security and children, further research is needed to design effective policies and interventions. For example:

- **Long-term developmental impacts:** While research to date shows how climate stress affects children's immediate health; more studies are needed on how it shapes long-term development outcomes.
- **Role of children in solutions:** There is little research on how children can actively contribute to climate resilience and peacebuilding efforts. For example, on climate change adaptation, little is known about how children themselves cope with and adapt to climate insecurity, making it harder to design child-centred solutions.
- **Diverse settings:** While the Sahel has traditionally been a focus for understanding the climate change, livelihood, and conflict link, more studies are needed to understand the nuances of these dynamics in different settings, including any links with non-state armed group recruitment or support. Very different dynamics are likely to be at play in Central America, where child climate migrants are targets for forced recruitment into *maras* and criminal gangs; for Amazonian communities where children face threats from assassination, violent displacement and pollution; or coastal Asia where cyclones may lead to children being pushed into child labour. The recruitment and use of children by criminal gangs and extreme child exploitation are both areas that remain highly understudied thematically as well.
- **More and better data:** UNICEF's Children's Climate Risk Index (CCRI) is a tool that fuses what is known about exposure and vulnerability for children. It is formulated using data on children's exposure to natural and environmental hazards, cross-indexed with data on child-specific vulnerabilities (including health, nutrition, education, water and sanitation, conflict and poverty). Building on this global CCRI, UNICEF and partners are collaborating on the subnational Children's Climate Risk Index-Disaster Risk Model (CCRI-DRM) initiative, which will help identify pressing climate, environmental, and disaster threats facing children, young people, and their communities and the best ways to protect them from these risks.

However, significant knowledge gaps persist in the data needed to identify vulnerabilities for children, with the largest barrier being the lack of age, gender and disability disaggregated data, particularly at sub-national levels. In addition, data on institutional capacity and community resilience, which are both needed to protect children now, and in the future, are missing in most

conflict-affected and fragile contexts. Efforts to track children in climate change adaptation and peacebuilding efforts are further complicated as there is no specific marker singling out age. Better arrangement and categorisation of existing efforts could aid in further analysis. Moreover, systematic ex-post monitoring of both economic and non-economic impacts of climate-related extreme events on children, across conflict and non-conflict settings, is crucial for deeper understanding of vulnerabilities and improving future preparedness.

- **Broad research gaps:** A comprehensive approach is needed to address the intersection of climate vulnerability, conflict, and child well-being. This includes mapping climate-vulnerable countries affected by conflict and analysing the complex relationship between child malnutrition, climate, and conflict—taking into account global, regional, and local dynamics, as well as both chronic and acute outcomes happening today and in the future. It is also essential to deepen our understanding of children's livelihoods and social protection systems, with a focus on safeguarding family incomes in the face of climate and conflict-related challenges. Additionally, there is a need to understand what is required for preparing and sustaining essential services for children during times of conflict, disaster, and displacement by working closely with local systems and actors to promote governance, inclusion, and resilience. Finally, identifying and addressing the barriers to disaster risk reduction and anticipatory humanitarian action is critical, along with linking these efforts to broader strategies for climate change adaptation and peacebuilding in fragile setting.

### Box 3: Children's Climate Risk Index - Disaster Risk Model (CCRI-DRM)

In alignment with UNICEF's Sustainability and Climate Change Action Plan, the CCRI-DRM fills the child responsive data gap by generating foundational evidence to assess climate and disaster risks at a subnational level across key indicators identified by national stakeholders. The CCRI-DRM is developed in close coordination with civil society and national governments, ensuring that it both reflects the reality of children in the country and is a sustainable tool that will inform national and subnational policy and programming.

The CCRI-DRM initiative seeks to strengthen communities' resilience by identifying the root causes of climate, environmental, and disaster risks that lead to the erosion of development progress and informing prioritization of the risks faced by communities. Recognizing that each country experiences different contexts, the CCRI-DRM can be customized to the needs of national stakeholders to include the risks that are most relevant to them. For example, the Cambodia CCRI-DRM includes information on children exposed to violence in the vulnerability analysis.



# Climate security in practice

Achieving climate security is an inherently multi-sector undertaking, requiring strengthened coordination across climate, development, humanitarian, disaster risk management, and peace actors. Efforts have focused on the following three areas:

## Integration of climate action with security and peacekeeping

There has been increased attention to the impact of climate change on security situations relevant to the UN Security Council (UNSC)'s mandate including those on peacekeeping, peacebuilding and special political missions. In fact, as of 2020, six out of the 10 largest UN peacekeeping missions were in countries highly exposed to climate change. Although there have been a number of UNSC meetings, resolutions and statements that recognise different aspects of climate and security risks, the language of these texts has often been qualified or focused on specific countries or regions in Africa. Efforts to put the issue more firmly on UNSC's regular agenda have met with resistance. Unfortunately, to date, there have been no thematic resolutions dedicated to Climate, Peace, and Security adopted at the Security Council level.

In addition, there has been relatively little attention paid by the UNSC to how children are impacted by both conflict and climate change. While there are 11 resolutions mandating UN missions to work on climate, and which also include language on children and armed conflict, these two areas are not connected. In contrast, there has been momentum on Youth, Peace and Security, integrating climate and environment with youth engagement in peacebuilding.

## Integration of conflict-sensitive approaches into climate action and environmental protection

The responses to immediate survival needs of conflict-affected people and climate change mitigation and adaptation measures in conflict zones remain largely siloed, failing to recognise how these interventions could mutually reinforce efforts to strengthen resilience among crisis-affected populations.

When climate change adaptation programmes are designed and delivered through a conflict-sensitive lens (e.g. keeping the unique needs of conflict-affected population in mind) then they can be an entry point for peacebuilding: enabling dialogue and cooperation across groups, building trust with governments, and strengthening civil society and social cohesion. Approaches which have strong connections to children's well-being have focused on: a) natural resource management, b) livelihoods and social protection, c) disaster risk reduction, and d) renewable energy.

### **a) Natural resource management**

Natural resource management is increasingly seen as a key avenue for peacebuilding, particularly in conflict-prone regions. [A review of the UN Peacebuilding Fund \(PBF\)](#) highlights that local,



'bottom-up' peacebuilding initiatives focused on natural resource issues can reduce conflict and address social issues like youth and women's exclusion. However, if natural resource management projects don't consider their broader impacts, they can exacerbate tensions, such as when irrigation and agriculture reduce land available for pastoralists, worsening inter-communal conflict.

In regions like the Sahel, where farming and herding communities rely on the same resources, the integration of natural resource management with peacebuilding is crucial. Examples include work along borders in Central Africa and Chad, where agreements were made to regulate cross-border movement of herding groups and provide public services in exchange for compliance. Additionally, ecosystem restoration projects can have multiple benefits, including reducing flooding, extreme heat, and improving children's nutrition by increasing food diversity. Transitioning to cleaner cooking fuels can also reduce harmful indoor air pollution, benefiting children's health.

## **b) Livelihoods and social protection**

Climate change adaptation and peacebuilding also aim to address the livelihood mechanisms that may contribute to the risks of conflict. In Guatemala, e.g., climate-resilient farming helps restore social networks disrupted by violence and displacement, improving nutrition for children and mothers. Similarly, alternative income programmes, such as India's public employment initiative, provide a safety net during climate shocks and reduce conflict. Brazil's Bolsa Familia cash transfers for teens have been linked to a decrease in crime in school neighbourhoods.

Cash-based interventions are also essential to reduce children's exposure to harm from both conflict and climate change. These transfers help reduce domestic violence and improve parents' ability to care for children, especially during crises like in Somalia. However, while cash transfers are beneficial, they need to be combined with trauma support and cultural change initiatives.

Despite advancements in building social protection systems, coverage remains limited, especially in low- and middle-income countries. Only 40 per cent of children receive social transfers, and those most at risk from climate shocks often have the least protection. Anticipatory cash transfers and rapid scaling of social protection after disasters have proven effective in reducing financial and emotional stress, yet social protection still receives only 9 per cent of adaptation funding.

Social protection programmes in countries like Brazil, Ethiopia, and Indonesia demonstrate that natural resource management, paired with poverty alleviation, can yield positive environmental and social outcomes, benefiting both children and the environment.

## **c) Disaster risk reduction**

Disaster risk reduction (DRR) has the potential to support conflict resolution and peacebuilding, as both disaster and conflict risks stem from shared vulnerabilities. Integrating early warning systems with conflict analysis can help identify and mitigate overlapping risks. However, DRR investment in fragile and conflict-affected areas remains low, with only US\$1.30 spent on DRR for every US\$100 on emergency response, and as little as five cents in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Despite limited progress, some initiatives demonstrate DRR's role in fostering peace, such as partnerships in Haiti to address violence impeding disaster mitigation, the 2004 Aceh tsunami facilitating peace talks, and eco-DRR projects in Honduras, East Timor, and Syria reducing conflict through natural resource management.

A key challenge is the lack of conflict-sensitive approaches in DRR policies, as global frameworks like the Sendai Framework do not specifically address conflict-affected contexts. However, there is growing recognition of the need to integrate DRR with peacebuilding. Prevention efforts that enhance coping and adaptive capacities before disasters or conflicts occur could serve as an effective entry point for fostering resilience and sustainable peace.

#### **d) Renewable energy**

Increasingly, renewable energy projects are seen as a potential tool for peacebuilding, as energy poverty is linked to fragility and conflict. Decentralised renewable energy, such as solar mini-grids, can provide isolated and conflict-affected communities with electricity, promoting economic growth and poverty reduction.

However, evidence on the direct impact of decentralised renewable energy on peace and human development remains limited. Benefits tend to concentrate in areas with high investment, and concerns persist over the long-term sustainability of off-grid systems. Additionally, solar-powered water stations in ecologically fragile areas risk depleting aquifers, potentially leading to further conflict or displacement.

There is stronger evidence supporting peacebuilding initiatives that integrate green jobs for marginalised youth. In Burkina Faso, EU-supported training programmes in solar installation and energy efficiency help address employability, youth radicalisation, and energy sustainability. Similarly, New York City partners with clean energy initiatives to connect at-risk youth to high-paying green jobs while also providing conflict resolution training. These programmes help overcome barriers to employment in the green economy, contributing to both stability and sustainability.

## **Strengthening of climate and conflict sensitivity across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus (HDP)**

The climate crisis is promoting renewed attention to the humanitarian, development and peace nexus, an approach that has taken shape over recent years to address the common structural drivers of crises, poverty and conflict. The HDP nexus seeks to break silos and create synergies across short-term humanitarian assistance, long-term development, and peacebuilding. From a child rights perspective, this means the deliberate design and implementation of humanitarian and development programmes that improve children's and adolescents' safety, increase equitable access to services and opportunities, and strengthen social cohesion. As a result, humanitarian and development partners have begun to explore how e.g. their programmes can contribute to both peacebuilding and climate change adaptation. A common foundation for nexus approaches to climate security is a thorough analysis and understanding of local dynamics—both socio-economic, political and environmental. This is then paired with strong local engagement—state and civil society actors alike—and participatory mechanisms, especially those that include the voices of children and families. Programmes foster environmental sustainability and peace by promoting inclusive decision-making, accountable institutions, equitable economic opportunities, and conflict resolution—particularly through women and girls' active participation.

# Recommendations for achieving climate security for and with children

Advancing children's rights amid the escalating climate security crisis remains a significant challenge. To make meaningful progress, it is essential to deepen our understanding of how climate change, security, and children's rights intersect. While there is a solid grasp of children's heightened vulnerability to climate impacts and the risks tied to conflict and displacement, further efforts are needed to explore the complex dynamics of climate-related fragility and conflict, and to address the specific needs of children in these contexts both as they are happening today and as they continue to evolve in the future. Below are some suggestions:

## Strengthen further the nexus of climate, humanitarian, development and peace

- **Increase synergies between the climate and the humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding actors in conflict-affected and fragile countries**, or those with major humanitarian needs, including on financing, raising the climate security and child rights intersection on their agendas.
- **Connect disaster risk reduction (DRR) and peacebuilding prevention** to promote coping and adaptive capacities in advance of disasters or violent events, including with displaced and conflict-affected people. Develop the evidence and guidance to support these efforts.
- **Encourage communication, joint analysis planning and monitoring** between climate, conflict and child protection experts, to build capacity, expertise and the evidence base on this intersection, which can in turn guide future investments. Future investments should look to maximise the co-benefits of climate and conflict sensitive programming and ensure that climate finance, including Loss and Damage funds, reach children and families on the frontlines of the climate crisis.

## Ensure children and young people are actively involved in climate security discussions and related global policy frameworks.

- **Raise the profile of children and climate security** by encouraging high-level discussions that include both climate security and children, such as the UNFCCC COP30 and 31, as well as global conferences like Munich Security Conference, including children in its climate, peace and security discussions.

- **Invite, prepare for, and integrate children's invaluable insights** in the climate security space. Facilitate the capacity-building of young leaders and secure them a place in local, national and international decision making on priorities, policies and funding decisions regarding climate adaptation and mitigation.
- **Engage children, young people and youth-led organisations in climate action and peacebuilding**, including in the formation and implementation of the NDCs, the conflict-sensitive and climate-sensitive development planning conducted by international and bilateral agencies, and in bringing climate-sensitive and forward-thinking perspectives to peacebuilding efforts in conflict and post-conflict areas and addressing barriers to participation for children and young people from fragile and conflict settings to these discussions.

## Continue to improve data and research

- **Strengthen collaborative, interdisciplinary research frameworks, and data-sharing and analysis between different UN bodies and non-UN entities**, using e.g., the UNICEF's Children's Climate Risk Index (CCRI), UNEP's Environmental Data Explorer, UNDP's Global Crisis Risk Dashboard, and other tools. Ultimately the information gathered and analysed should work toward better understanding impacts on children and what type of programming interventions work.
- **Conduct additional research in areas affected by climate change and instability or conflict** (e.g., the Sahel, Central America, Horn of Africa, South Sudan) to examine the varying impacts on children based on age, gender, disability, and other traits, to develop nuanced and disaggregated data.
- **Utilise strategic foresight** can be a powerful tool in addressing interconnected issues at the climate-security-children nexus as it involves thinking creatively about possible futures. Strategic foresight can help us understand how climate change might impact children's well-being in different regions and diverse settings in the future, anticipate potential security threats that could put children at risk, identify emerging opportunities, and develop strategies to ensure children have access to education, healthcare, and other essential services even in a changing environment, help imagine different climate and security futures, considering factors like resource scarcity, migration patterns, and political instability, as well as support child participation to empower children and youth to contribute their perspectives on climate futures, ensuring solutions are inclusive and grounded in lived experience.

## Conclusion

The intersection of climate and security presents a critical threat to children's well-being, exacerbating health risks, educational disruption, and protection vulnerabilities. As climate change intensifies, so too will its security implications—especially for the most marginalised children. Understanding and addressing the compounded impacts of climate insecurity on children is essential for building a more resilient future for future generations.

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## About us

**UNICEF** works in the world's toughest places to reach the most disadvantaged children and adolescents — and to protect the rights of every child, everywhere. Across 190 countries and territories, we do whatever it takes to help children survive, thrive and fulfil their potential, from early childhood through adolescence. And we never give up.

**UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight** tackles the questions of greatest importance for children, both current and emerging. It drives change through research and foresight on a wide range of child rights issues, sparking global discourse and actively engaging young people in its work.

UNICEF Innocenti equips thought leaders and decision-makers with the evidence they need to build a better, safer world for children. The office undertakes research on unresolved and emerging issues, using primary and secondary data that represents the voices of children and families themselves. It uses foresight to set the agenda for children, including horizon scanning, trends analysis and scenario development. The office produces a diverse and dynamic library of high-level reports, analyses and policy papers, and provides a platform for debate and advocacy on a wide range of child rights issues.

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for every child, **answers**





From Member Organisations of the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family

# Advancing Family Policies

How SDGs are achieved through family oriented policies

1 July 2025



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ifd papers

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls for inclusive, equitable, and people-centered policies to ensure that "no one is left behind." Central to achieving this vision is the family, a foundational social unit that contributes to the well-being, development, and resilience of individuals and communities.

The 2025 UNDESA Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) report—drawing on the experiences of 141 countries between 2020 and 2024—confirms that family-oriented policies are not only protective but transformative. When designed with all members of the family in mind, these policies act as powerful instruments to reduce poverty, ensure health, enhance education, promote gender equality, and build resilience to climate and demographic change.

This paper synthesizes findings from the 2025 VNR report, emphasizing the importance of family-oriented policy investments and highlighting good practices from countries that have excelled in implementing family-responsive legislation.

## The Strategic Importance of Family-Oriented Policies

Reframing care as a public good requires institutional investment in family policies that redistribute caregiving responsibilities, reduce gender disparities, and recognize the foundational role of households in sustaining well-being and economic security."

*UNDP Human Development Report, 2025, Chapter 4, p. 87*

Extracted from "Family-oriented Priorities, Policies and Programmes in the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as Reported in the Voluntary National Reviews of 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024". Background paper prepared for the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) Division for Inclusive Social Development by Prof. Rosario Esteinou PhD. CIESAS – Center of Research and Higher Studies in Social Anthropology) Mexico City. Available at: <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/family/events/international-day-of-families-2025-family-oriented-policies-for-sustainable>

Prepared by the International Organizations Department of the International Federation for Family Development.

sive analytical framework for understanding family-oriented policy, grounded in five perspectives: the socioecological model, welfare regime typologies, pre-distributive and redistributive strategies, social investment approaches, and gender responsiveness. Together, these frameworks reveal how inclusive family policies can address structural inequality and enhance human development over the life-course.

Families are essential nodes in the delivery of health, education, care, and social protection. They are often the first line of defense in crises—such as pandemics, conflicts, and climate shocks—and serve as vital agents of resilience and social cohesion. Despite this, the report notes a decline in the number of countries implementing family-oriented policies since 2019, driven by crises such as COVID-19, inflation, and environmental disasters.

Nevertheless, the evidence is clear: countries that invest in family-oriented policies show stronger, more equitable progress across multiple SDGs, particularly SDG 3 (health), SDG 4 (education), SDG 6 (water and sanitation), and SDG 11 (sustainable cities). Education emerged as the strongest area of progress, while setbacks in SDGs 5 (gender equality) and 16 (peace, justice, and child protection) reflect insufficient attention to care, safety, and legal empowerment of women within families.

### **Education and Parenting Support: A Beacon of Progress**

Countries that have made meaningful strides in education demonstrate the power of integrating families into learning systems. Uruguay, for example, implemented the *Plan Ceibal*, which provides digital devices and internet access to all students, while engaging parents in educational processes. This initiative not only reduced the digital divide but strengthened parent-school collaboration.

Finland and Spain also stand out for embedding digital parenting and online safety into national curricula. These family-oriented strategies help improve learning outcomes, digital literacy, and child protection simultaneously. In Costa Rica, the national education plan includes parental training to support early learning at home—a crucial element for ensuring equity in early childhood development.

Early childhood education (SDG 4.2) has received significant attention. Mexico expanded *Centros de Atención Infantil*, offering integrated services for young children and working parents. In Bhutan and Uruguay, early education systems are closely linked with

nutritional and healthcare services, ensuring holistic support for family well-being from the earliest years.

### **Health and Wellbeing: From Service Coverage to Mental Health**

The SDG 3 targets—especially those related to maternal health, child mortality, nutrition, mental health, and universal coverage—have seen growing family engagement. Costa Rica's digitized *EDUS* health system allows families to access appointments, test results, and health histories online, significantly improving healthcare efficiency and reducing administrative burdens.

India's expansion of telemedicine during the COVID-19 pandemic and Rwanda's smart health system for early diagnosis are examples of how technology can enhance family-level health outcomes. Saudi Arabia's *Sehhaty* app, Estonia's e-health infrastructure, and Egypt's remote maternal health services further underscore how digitization supports inclusive, family-friendly health systems.

A particularly transformative area is mental health (SDG 3.4). Recognizing rising suicide rates and psychological distress, countries like Finland and Germany have begun integrating family mental health support into community-based care systems. This approach is essential not only for immediate care but also for breaking cycles of intergenerational trauma and improving life-course wellbeing.

### **Urbanization and the Built Environment: Families at the Heart of City Planning**

SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities) offers a key arena where family-oriented policies are both impactful and underutilized. Brazil and Colombia have integrated family perspectives into urban planning, linking housing, mobility, and public safety into cohesive policies.

Austria's *Klimaticket* offers affordable, country-wide public transportation, reducing the commuting burden on working parents and enhancing mobility for multi-child households. Singapore's *Smart Nation* initiative creates dense but family-friendly neighborhoods with co-located childcare, eldercare, and recreational services. These policies demonstrate how urban infrastructure can either support caregiving and family cohesion.

Germany and Japan have introduced intergenerational urban models—integrating green space, accessible housing, and elderly-friendly amenities—which promote well-being across the life-course. Namibia’s focus on upgrading informal settlements for vulnerable households, especially women-headed families, further illustrates the potential of urban investment to reduce inequality.

### **Climate Resilience and Environmental Well-being: Centering Families**

Climate change (SDG 13) threatens every aspect of family wellbeing—from food security and health to displacement and livelihoods. Countries like Fiji and the Philippines are leading with community-based disaster preparedness plans that prioritize children and caregivers. In Vanuatu and Tuvalu, early warning systems and climate-resilient housing are designed with family relocation and protection in mind.

Bangladesh and Namibia have aligned social protection with climate goals, offering targeted cash transfers and public works programs during climate shocks. These strategies not only mitigate immediate harm but enhance long-term family resilience. Poland’s *Clean Air* programme and Spain’s family-focused environmental education show how mitigation can be integrated with support for households.

Costa Rica’s reforestation programs and Ireland’s energy poverty relief further confirm that sustainable development must be rooted in family wellbeing. These examples reveal that policies addressing environmental threats become more equitable and effective when they actively engage families.

### **Demographic Transitions and Inclusive Care Systems**

Demographic shifts, including ageing populations and youth bulges, require adaptive family policy. Japan’s comprehensive support for child-care, parental leave, and eldercare reflects a robust life-course approach. Spain and the Netherlands have integrated shared caregiving models and family-responsive housing into national strategies.

Latin American countries like Uruguay and Mexico have made notable progress in developing national care systems that redistribute care responsibilities among families, the state, and the market. These investments—such as Mexico’s universal pension for the elderly and *Becas para el Bienestar* for youth—align with both redistri-



butive and social investment goals.

These examples highlight the importance of universal care systems, early investment in children, and gender-responsive policies as the backbone of sustainable demographic adaptation.

### **Migration and Displacement: Supporting Families Across Borders**

Migration and displacement disrupt family structures and caregiving systems. Yet, when supported by inclusive policies, families can be powerful sources of resilience. Ecuador and Uganda have adopted family-sensitive integration strategies, offering access to education, health, and legal identity for migrants and displaced populations. Germany and Sweden have prioritized family reunification and children’s rights in asylum frameworks. Thailand and Malaysia offer legal aid and community-based services for trafficked or undocumented families. These examples demonstrate that family-responsive migration policies are not only humane but essential to achieving social cohesion and sustainable development.

### **Regional Leaders in Family-Responsive Legislation**

Several countries emerge as leaders in advancing family-responsive initiatives across sectors:

**Uruguay:** Comprehensive care system, early childhood development, and intergenerational policies.

**Costa Rica:** Integrated digital health and education services, rural family support.

**Finland:** Holistic early learning, parental engagement, and gender equality in care.

**Spain:** Gender equality strategies, universal access to early childhood services, and climate-inclusive urban planning.

**Mexico:** Intergenerational transfer programs, universal pensions, and youth development. **Austria:** Nationwide sustainable transport, housing, and childcare access.

**Japan:** Balanced demographic policy integrating work-family life and elderly care.

**Rwanda and India:** Smart health innovations reaching rural families.

**Colombia and Brazil:** Inclusive urban development and mobility systems.

**Qatar:** Legal protections and public service access for migrant families.

These countries exemplify how sustained political commitment, institutional innovation, and inclusive governance can advance family wellbeing across diverse context.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Investing in family-oriented policies is an important mean to achieve sustainable development. The 2025 VNR report shows that family-responsive legislation improves resilience, reduces inequality, and improves outcomes across health, education, care, and environmental systems.

However, progress remains uneven. Gender equality, unpaid care recognition, and child protection have suffered post-pandemic setbacks. Poverty, food insecurity, and urban exclusion persist, particularly in the Global South. To reverse these trends, the following actions are recommended:

**Scale Up Investment in Universal Family Services:** Governments should expand access to early childhood education, parental support, and integrated care systems.

**Mainstream Gender-Responsive Policy:** Legal reforms must promote shared caregiving, equal parental leave, and support for women's labour participation.

**Link Family Policy to Climate and Urban Planning:** Cities must embed family resilience into housing, transport, and green infrastructure systems.

**Strengthen Social Protection and Redistributive Frameworks:** Social transfers and services must be designed to support vulnerable households and prevent intergenerational transfer of poverty.

**Empower Families as Co-Implementers:** Participatory governance and family engagement in service design increase legitimacy, sustainability, and reach.

**Foster Data Systems and Evidence-Based Policy:** Improved measurement of care, child well-being, and family outcomes is essential to track progress and guide investments.

A renewed global commitment to family-oriented development is not merely a call for compassion—it is a strategic imperative to ensure inclusive, resilient, and sustainable societies by 2030 and beyond.

August 2025



Make  
Mothers  
Matter

## MMM ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE MOTHERS' ROLE AND RIGHTS

### Financing for Development Matters for Mothers and Families – MMM @ FfD4

While maternity-related or women's issues are not explicitly addressed, the topics discussed under the **Financing for Development (FfD)** framework have a huge impact on the lives of people, in particular women, even more so for those who are mothers.

These topics include notably **taxation, debt, trade, and more generally macro-economic policies**, and how these impact governments' ability to **mobilise domestic resources** to invest in social protection and in essential public infrastructure and services and implement SDGs – the main reasons why financing is needed.

Governments' inability to invest in social protection and essential public infrastructures and services, including water and sanitation, electricity and energy, healthcare, education, social and care services, transportation, ICT, etc., disproportionately impacts women who heavily rely on these public infrastructures and services:

- Women fill the gaps with their unpaid care work (e.g. to fetch water, care for a sick relative, bring a child to a distant school, etc.).
- The resulting privatisation of services like health and education make them inaccessible, in particular for mothers and children.
- It also reduces decent work opportunities in the public health and education sectors, again disproportionately impacting women, who tend to dominate these sectors.

#### Unfair taxation impacts mothers and families

At the national level, taxation systems around the world generally fail to account for the disproportionate unpaid care responsibilities and informal labour that women take on, too often reinforcing existing gender inequalities instead. Gender-blind tax systems tend to perpetuate the economic invisibility of women's labour and widen income and wealth gaps over time.

In particular, this applies to developing countries where **indirect taxation** – mainly consumption (e.g. VAT) and trade taxes – often make up 60% or more of revenues, and **direct taxes** (e.g. income, corporate, wealth taxes) are **underutilised, poorly progressive, and constrained by narrow tax bases**. Low- and middle-income countries typically only collect 10–15% of their GDP in total tax revenue, compared to about 34% in high-income countries.

Indirect taxation, which is prevalent in developing countries, has **regressive effects**, disproportionately impacting lower-income households, where women, single mothers in particular, are overrepresented.

Feminist organisations from the global South have therefore repeatedly called for the transformation of national tax systems to implement progressive taxation on income and wealth, with tax incentives or deductions for care work (e.g. childcare expenses).

At the global level, the international rules that govern taxation have also been inadequate and unfair for developing countries. Typically, multinationals use gaps in tax regulations to shift their profits to low- or non-tax locations. As a result, developing countries lose much needed revenues from tax avoidance, tax evasion and illicit financial flows, again with a disproportionate impact on women.

But there is hope. Pushed by developing countries and in spite of opposition from developed countries, work on a [UN Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation](#) was launched in 2024 in the run-up to FfD4, and negotiations are underway to reform the current international tax system. This is a very important step towards a fairer, more inclusive and effective international tax system.

Make Mothers Matter (MMM) has joined other feminist organisations to follow its development and ensure that a gender lens is taken in the drafting of this new treaty.

### **The debt crisis exacerbates inequalities**

Today, [more than 3.4 billion people live in countries that spend more on debt interest payments than on health or education](#). Debt costs remain disproportionately high in developing countries who face higher interest rates. As a result, 61 countries allocated more than 10% of their government revenues to debt interest in 2024, diverting resources for much-needed development spending.

High levels of sovereign debt generally translate into **austerity measures**, whereby public services and social protection are cut to manage debt. Women, especially mothers, and even more so when they are single, often bear the brunt of these austerity measures, [which increase their caregiving work](#) and restrict access to healthcare, education and social support. Feminist organisations have long denounced the structural adjustment programmes and loan conditionalities from international financial institutions like the IMF that impose austerity, as undermining gender equity.

The dire effects of the debt crisis are further exacerbated by a general **decrease of overseas development assistance (ODA)**. Not only have developed countries long failed to deliver on their commitment to dedicate 0.7% of their GDP to ODA, but ODA decreased by 9% in 2024 and the OECD estimates that it will further decrease by 9 to 15% in 2025.

### **Trade agreements are not gender neutral**

Trade policies and global trade agreements also impact women's economic opportunities and vulnerabilities. While international trade can create jobs for women, especially in export-oriented industries like textiles and agriculture, these are often characterised by low wages, poor working conditions and limited rights. Trade liberalisation may increase competitiveness, but it can also drive informalisation of labour, disproportionately affecting women who lack legal and social protection. Furthermore, trade policies rarely include gender impact assessments, which means their unintended consequences on women's economic security are largely unaddressed.

For trade to be truly inclusive, women's voices must be part of the policy-making processes, and trade frameworks need to integrate gender considerations, including care-related aspects, from the outset.

Because of the many links between these FfD topics and the issue of unpaid care work, which is a key priority in MMM's work, MMM participated in the [4th International Conference on Financing for Development](#), which took place from 30 June to 3 July 2025 in Sevilla, Spain.

Read more [here](#) about MMM's participation and analysis of the Conference outcome, the [Compromiso de Sevilla](#).

## **Unpaid Care at the Core: A Catalyst for Achieving the SDGs – MMM at the UN High-level Political Forum**

On 16 July 2025, MMM hosted the side-event [Unpaid Care at the Core: A Catalyst for Achieving the SDGs](#) at the UN High-level Political Forum (HLPF). The event aimed at highlighting the interlinkages between unpaid care work and the Sustainable Development Goals – in particular SDG 5, SDG 3 and SDG 8, which were under review this year – and showcasing effective policies and practices that place care – and mothers – at the heart of policy-making, generating powerful synergies across sectors and goals.





### MMM's main objectives

- Highlight that care is essential to the realisation of many SDGs beyond SDG 5, in particular SDG 3 and SDG 8
- Show how addressing the issue of the inequitable distribution of unpaid care and domestic work in a cross-sectoral manner can foster synergies, thereby contributing to the implementation of SDG 3 (including early childhood development, mental health) and SDG 8 (including women's labour force participation, a just transition)
- Provide concrete examples of policies and practices that have successfully created such synergies
- Call on governments at every level to implement cross-sectoral care systems that recognise, support and redistribute the unpaid work of caring.

### Key takeaways

- Care is a strategic lever for sustainable development, cutting across sectors and goals. It must be institutionally embedded within policy planning and implementation at all levels, from local to global, to drive progress towards the 2030 Agenda.
- The unequal distribution of unpaid care work is both a driver and consequence of gender inequality, with profound implications for women's physical and mental health, labour force participation, and access to rights, particularly among mothers, migrants and those facing intersecting forms of marginalisation.
- Advancing care systems requires a paradigm shift towards intersectoral, inclusive and life-course approaches that address the needs of both caregivers and care recipients, while recognising the diversity of caregiving arrangements and lived realities.
- Reframing care as a collective social and economic responsibility is essential. This requires moving away from its relegation to the private sphere, towards its recognition as a public good, funded, legislated and institutionalised as a matter of justice and societal resilience.
- The current policy moment presents a critical opportunity. Global milestones, including Beijing+30, the World Social Summit and regional reviews, must be leveraged to elevate care within global development frameworks and to ensure accountability for care-centred, gender-transformative action.

The event's report and its full recording are available [here](#), with additional information provided [here](#).

See also MMM's [written statement to the HLPF, Placing Target 5.4 at the Core: A Key to Accelerating SDG Synergies](#), on which MMM built its side-event.

**This statement calls for greater attention to target 5.4 of the 2030 development agenda, which calls for measuring, valuing and redistributing unpaid domestic and care work, and which is one of the most off-track and neglected targets. Not only is it crucial to progress on gender equality, but MMM's statement shows that focusing on this target and its associated indicator can create significant synergies across SDGs implementation efforts.**

## The Role of Families in Promoting Gender Equality – MMM at 59th UN Human Rights Council

Speaking at a side-event organised by the Mission of Kyrgyzstan on **The Family: Foundation of Society, Driver of Development and Human Rights**, MMM's intervention focused on **the role of families in promoting gender equality, particularly through the more equitable distribution of unpaid care work.**

### MMM's key messages

- While families can be sites of gender-based violence and discrimination, they are also powerful spaces for transformative change when gender equality is promoted from within.
- Globally, women perform significantly more unpaid care work than men – up to 10 times more in some countries. This care gap limits women's economic independence and reinforces outdated gender norms.
- Time-use surveys are absolutely necessary to monitor progress in redistributing unpaid care and domestic work within families, as per SDG 5 target 5.4; Kyrgyzstan must be commended for conducting regular time-use surveys that track unpaid care work.
- Involving men, especially fathers, in caregiving is crucial. It improves child well-being, reduces stress and domestic violence, and sets positive examples for future generations.
- Policy and cultural change needed: structural supports like paid parental leave, affordable childcare and flexible work must be backed by societal change. Men must be encouraged to take an equal role in caregiving, and women must help enable this shift.
- Single-parent households, which are mostly single mothers, face heightened vulnerability and need targeted support as part of broader efforts towards co-responsibility for care.

**Gender equality does begin in the home. It begins when men step up as caregivers, when women are supported in pursuing their own aspirations. But care must also be – as a collective responsibility – shared by families, communities, governments and the private sector.**

Read more on MMM's activities at the 59th Session of the Human Rights Council [here](#).

## Breaking the Cycle: Gender Equality as a Path to Better Mental Health

The Council of the European Union has taken a decisive step in recognising the vital connection between **gender equality and mental health**. In its EPSCO (Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs) [Conclusions on strengthening women's and girls' mental health by promoting gender equality](#), the Council underscores the urgent need to address gender-based disparities in mental well-being. This initiative is a game-changer, reinforcing the idea that gender equality is not just a matter of fairness – it is essential for a healthier, more resilient society.

MMM is especially proud that its report [Single Mothers in Europe](#) was among the key references used by the Council in drafting these crucial Conclusions.

### The unique mental health challenges faced by women and girls

Mental health conditions affect everyone, but women and girls face distinct and disproportionate risks. Research consistently shows that societal structures, economic pressures and caregiving responsibilities amplify these challenges. According to the [WHO European Framework for Action on Mental Health 2021–2025](#), women – particularly those with psychosocial, intellectual, cognitive and neurodevelopmental disabilities – are at an increased risk of social exclusion.

Several factors contribute to this inequality:

- **Workplace stress and economic vulnerability:** Women are overrepresented in low-wage jobs with high stress and poor working conditions, leading to burnout and anxiety.



- **Barriers to mental health care:** Women face gender-specific obstacles in accessing timely and adequate mental health services, leaving many without the support they need.
- **Domestic violence and trauma:** The [EU Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence](#) highlights the profound impact of domestic abuse on mental health. Additionally, children who witness domestic violence are at an increased risk of developing mental health conditions.
- **Gender disparities in mental well-being:** Across Europe, self-assessment surveys consistently reveal that women report lower levels of mental well-being compared to men. For example, mental health conditions, including those that contribute to suicidal thoughts and behaviours, are more prevalent among women.

#### **The gender care gap: a silent crisis in mental health**

One of the most overlooked drivers of mental health inequality is the gender care gap. Women, particularly mothers, shoulder the majority of unpaid care work, which not only limits their career prospects, but also places an immense psychological responsibility on them.

- **Single mothers are at a high risk of mental health struggles** due to financial insecurity, social isolation and overwhelming responsibilities.
- **Maternal mental health is a critical issue.** Perinatal depression is widespread, and the first 1,000 days of a child's life are crucial for the well-being of both mother and baby. Accessible childcare, shared caregiving and flexible working arrangements are essential.
- **Long-term caregivers – most of whom are women – experience mental health conditions at rates 20% higher than non-caregivers.**
- **Older women, who live longer than men, need adequate mental health support.**
- **Women and girls with disabilities are among the most vulnerable.**

#### **Key recommendations for Member States**

1. **Eliminating gender disparities:** Implementing policies that reduce gender-based mental health inequalities by alleviating the unpaid care load and expanding access to mental health services
2. **Improving work-life balance:** Introducing flexible working arrangements, enhancing access to affordable childcare, and ensuring an equitable division of care responsibilities between men and women
3. **Strengthening mental health services:** Ensuring that single mothers, caregivers and women in vulnerable situations have access to medical, social and psychological support with minimal barriers
4. **Boosting economic empowerment:** Addressing gender pay gaps and employment progression barriers to enhance women's financial independence and resilience against mental health struggles
5. **Supporting survivors of violence:** Providing trauma-informed care and robust protection mechanisms for victims of domestic violence and gender-based discrimination
6. **Promoting holistic well-being:** Launching initiatives that encourage healthy lifestyles, stress management and accessible recreational activities for women and girls
7. **Investing in social support networks:** Strengthening community-based support, quality childcare services, and caregiving assistance to ease the mental load on women and mothers.

Access the full text of the Conclusions [here](#) and the full article [here](#).

## **Ensuring Work-Life Balance: The EU's Commitment to Supporting Parents, Notably Mothers, and Gender Equality**

The Council of the European Union adopted groundbreaking Conclusions aimed at addressing work-life balance and promoting gender equality across generations in response to demographic challenges.

MMM warmly welcomes the commitments made by Member States in approving these [Council Conclusions](#). For years, MMM has worked tirelessly to highlight the unique challenges faced by mothers, ensuring that their voices are heard at the EU level. This milestone marks a significant step forward in recognising and addressing these challenges.

### A major win for parents, especially mothers

MMM is particularly encouraged by the Council's recognition of the **specific difficulties mothers face** when juggling work and family life. These new recommendations have the potential to drive meaningful change for families across the EU, ensuring greater support, fairness and flexibility in the workplace and beyond.

#### Key recommendations for a better work-life balance

- **Encouraging family-friendly workplaces**
- **Expanding early childhood education and care (ECEC)**
- **Strengthening the European Child Guarantee**
- **Fostering flexible working arrangements**
- Raising awareness that all parents, especially mothers, may need support in **balancing work and family life**
- **Ensuring gender equality in the workplace**
- **Recognising the value of care work** and its social and economic importance for collective well-being
- **Preventing discrimination and retaliation** in care-related leaves or flexible working arrangements
- **Promoting collective bargaining and social dialogue** for work-life balance policies
- **Involving men as agents of change** and encouraging greater participation of fathers, partners and male informal carers in caregiving responsibilities
- **Supporting families with additional needs**, such as families with members who have disabilities or illnesses, and taking the specific needs of single-parent households into account
- **Advancing intergenerational solidarity** and developing policies that foster cooperation and mutual support between generations
- **Enhancing data collection** on maternity, paternity, parental leave, and flexible working arrangements
- **Promoting the equal sharing of unpaid care work**: Strengthening female economic self-sufficiency by ensuring both women and men share caregiving responsibilities equitably.

This landmark agreement is a vital step in building a more inclusive and supportive Europe where all parents, especially mothers, can achieve a sustainable work-life balance without compromising their careers or well-being.

Access the Council Conclusions [here](#) and the full article [here](#).

## Gender Equality: The New EU Roadmap for Women's Rights

With the new [Roadmap for Women's Rights](#), the EU acknowledges that gender equality remains a challenge across Member States, with women still earning 12.7% less than men and facing greater employment gaps, particularly mothers.

While more women are graduating from university, many continue to encounter barriers such as unpaid labour, gender discrimination and gender-based violence. The [2024 Gender Equality Index \(EIGE\)](#) highlights the slow and uneven progress, stressing that gender inequality costs the EU an estimated €370 billion annually. Urgent action is needed.

MMM welcomes the EU's new [Roadmap for Women's Rights](#), which strongly focuses on key gender equality issues aligning with MMM's mission to support and recognise mothers in society. It addresses crucial areas MMM has been working on for many years, such as work-life balance, equal employment opportunities, economic empowerment, quality education, access to healthcare and freedom from gender-based violence.

MEPs Maria Walsh (EPP) and Eleonora Meleti aptly describe the gender pay gap: *"Imagine working for the whole year, yet effectively working for free for the last month and a half."* They also emphasise that *gender inequality extends beyond the workplace, with global crises disproportionately affecting women's mental and physical health. For them, equality in name means nothing without equality in reality."*

**Strengthening the care economy:** The Roadmap underscores the importance of the care economy in enabling women's labour market participation. Enhancing access to quality early childhood education and long-term care, as well as investing in the care sector, are vital steps towards supporting caregivers – who are predominantly women.

**Work-life balance and care responsibilities:** MMM supports the Roadmap's emphasis on equal care responsibilities, including encouraging fathers to take paternity leave and promoting flexible working conditions.

**Equal employment opportunities and decent working conditions:** Closing the gender employment gap requires tackling occupational segregation, workplace harassment, and unequal career advancement opportunities. MMM strongly supports these measures to foster an inclusive and equitable workforce where mothers are not discriminated on the basis of maternity.

**Economic empowerment and equal pay:** The Roadmap's commitment to closing gender pay and pension gaps, ensuring pay transparency and promoting financial literacy is crucial.

**High standards of health and well-being:** MMM supports the Roadmap's goals of providing quality obstetric, gynaecological, antenatal, childbirth and postnatal care, free from discrimination and harmful practices.

**Quality and inclusive education:** Education is a powerful tool for gender equality. The Roadmap highlights the need for gender-balanced education. Encouraging women in STEM and men in traditionally female-dominated fields can help break gender stereotypes and create a balanced workforce.

MMM applauds the EU's gender equality commitment to these crucial areas in its [Roadmap for Women's Rights](#). However, real implementation across Member States is essential to create tangible improvements in mothers' daily lives. As MEPs Walsh and Meleti put it:

***“The time for asking why we're talking about gender equality is over. The real question is: what are we doing to make it happen?”***

Access the full article [here](#).

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

## ***Recent and Upcoming Events***

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

### **September**

- 18. -19.; Zurich, Switzerland: 19. International Conference on Identity Politics  
<https://waset.org/identity-politics-conference-in-september-2025-in-zurich>
- 25.- 26.; Lisbon, Portugal: 19. International Conference on Child and Family Studies  
<https://waset.org/child-and-family-studies-conference-in-september-2025-in-lisbon>

### **October**

- 02. – 03; Dubrovnik, Croatia: 19. International Conference on Gender, Feminist and Women's Studies  
<https://waset.org/gender-feminist-and-womens-studies-conference-in-october-2025-in-dubrovnik>
- 16. – 17.; Kathmandu, Nepal: 19. International Conference on Gender Sociology, Gender, Sex and Sexuality  
<https://waset.org/gender-sociology-gender-sex-and-sexuality-conference-in-october-2025-in-kathmandu>

### **November**

- 03. – 04.; Amsterdam, Netherlands: 19. International Conference on Education, Cultural and Disability Studies  
<https://waset.org/education-cultural-and-disability-studies-conference-in-november-2025-in-amsterdam>
- 10. – 11.; Tokyo, Japan: 19. International Conference on Domestic and Sexual Violence  
<https://waset.org/domestic-and-sexual-violence-conference-in-november-2025-in-tokyo>

### **December**

- 11. – 12.; Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: International Conference on Family Law and Children's Rights  
<https://waset.org/family-law-and-childrens-rights-conference-in-december-2025-in-kuala-lumpur>
- 11. – 12. Goa, India: 19. International Conference on Gender, Sex and Healthcare  
<https://waset.org/gender-sex-and-healthcare-conference-in-december-2025-in-goa>
- 11. – 12. Goa, India: 19. International Conference on Abortions and Womens Health  
<https://waset.org/abortions-and-womens-health-conference-in-december-2025-in-goa>

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