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Dear Readers of 'Families International',

Issue 134 focuses on a variety of topics regarding children, mothers and families.

The first text, a summary from UNICEF Innocenti, shows a hopeful outlook on the possibilities regarding the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and how this could affect children and young people.

This issue also includes two texts from member organisations of the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family. One from the International Federation for Family Development (IFFD) on flexible work arrangements, the other from Make Mothers Matter (MMM), about the state of mothers in Europe regarding their mental health, as well as possible solutions and initiatives to help women in their everyday life.

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

Sincerely,

Julia Birner B.A., B.Sc.

Executive Editor

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From UNICEF Innocenti

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AUDA-NEPAD
AFRICAN UNION DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Unlocking the Potential of AfCFTA for Africa's Young Population



Introduction

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) represents an unprecedented opportunity to boost economic growth across the continent. It aims to create a single, continent-wide market for goods and services across 54 African countries.¹



The AfCFTA encompasses the world's largest free trade area in terms of population, encompassing 1.3 billion people and a combined gross domestic product (GDP) of US\$3.4 trillion.²

The AfCFTA's vision extends beyond tariff reduction to tackle a range of pressing issues, including customs cooperation, trade facilitation, technical barriers to trade, non-tariff barriers, trade in services, promotion of investment, competition policy and intellectual property rights. It also includes protocols on Digital Trade and Women and Youth in Trade.

While the AfCFTA holds great potential for economic growth and poverty reduction, its successful implementation faces many obstacles, including incomplete negotiations, lack of binding provisions for the informal trade sector, potential tariff revenue losses and job displace-

ment, and supply-side constraints such as inadequate transport connectivity. Compared to previous regional integration initiatives, the AfCFTA has a deeper integration agenda with potential for mitigating these risks, but its success requires a common understanding and a willingness to implement it. Other regional policy instruments could also help to address the supply-side barriers, provided they are implemented in conjunction with the AfCFTA.

The successful implementation of the AfCFTA also offers opportunities beyond economic development, particularly for Africa's growing young population (defined as those aged 0–24 years). Harnessing the considerable potential of Africa's human capital could help the continent to diversify, grow its economy and boost production of high-value-added goods and services – and ultimately tackle the extreme levels of poverty that persist in many African countries. At the same time, if not appropriately managed and mitigated, the AfCFTA can also create some risks to the welfare of Africa's young generation.

This paper seeks to: (1) explore the potential impacts of the AfCFTA on children across the continent using different scenarios; and (2) stimulate policy dialogue on how the AfCFTA, in conjunction with other relevant regional frameworks, can help African nations to capitalize on the continent's demographic dividend. While existing studies have assessed the impact of the agreement on economic outcomes, this paper offers a unique contribution by: (1) using foresight analysis (Box 1) to examine the medium- and long-term impacts of the AfCFTA on select human capital outcomes; (2) projecting to an extended time horizon (up to the year 2063, significantly longer than previous studies), thereby providing a long-term perspective; and (3) assessing how catalytic investments can amplify the effects of the AfCFTA on economic and select human capital outcomes.

BOX 1. THE INTERNATIONAL FUTURES MODEL

The International Futures (IFs) forecasting framework was developed by the Pardee Center for International Futures.³ This study uses the model to assess the impacts of the AfCFTA on Africa's developmental trajectory under three different scenarios.

DIFFERENT SCENARIOS OF AFRICA'S DEVELOPMENTAL



Baseline scenario or Current Path with no-AfCFTA implementation

- Dynamic continuation of policies and priorities in the absence of AfCFTA implementation



Baseline scenario with AfCFTA implementation

- Gradual reduction of intra-African tariffs, ultimately reaching full elimination by 2030
- Constrained non-tariff barriers
- Increased bilateral economic complementarity
- Inward foreign direct investment



AfCFTA for Africa's Young Population scenario

- Builds on the transformative AfCFTA potential
- Allows for strategic investment of revenue gains from full AfCFTA implementation
- Supports education, welfare transfers, and research and development



Why does the AfCFTA matter to the young population?



On its own, the AfCFTA could result in 400,000 fewer stunted children and 220,000 fewer malnourished children by 2063 compared to a no-AfCFTA scenario. This is inadequate to address the scale of Africa's child malnutrition crisis, underscoring the need for complementary action to leverage the AfCFTA to improve child nutrition fully.

Health and nutrition

The AfCFTA offers significant opportunities to enhance child health and nutrition security through trade, but this requires targeted policy actions, including strengthening regional value chains for essential medicines, vaccines and nutritious baby foods, and enhancing regional coordination for health security and sovereignty.

The key risks include the increased availability of harmful products like ultra-processed foods and sugar-sweetened beverages, which could exacerbate existing public health challenges. There are also concerns about potential increases in staple food prices affecting vulnerable households, and constraints in building robust regional supply chains due to limited production capacity, regulatory fragmentation and skills shortages.



Combining AfCFTA implementation with complementary climate policies could boost renewable energy use by 5–12 per cent by 2045, while still increasing intra-African trade compared to a scenario without AfCFTA implementation or adoption

of climate policies.⁴

Climate, environment and water security

The agreement presents opportunities to accelerate Africa's transition to green industries and renewable energy, develop regional value chains in critical minerals essential for green technologies, and enhance water security through technology transfer and infrastructure development. However, efforts to capitalize on these opportunities require strategic action. On its own, and without any complementary policies, the impact of the AfCFTA on Africa's green transition will be modest.

The implementation of the AfCFTA could also increase environmental risks, including increased emissions from manufacturing and transportation, and creation of potential negative environmental and social consequences of expanded mineral extraction (such as child labour). The combination of climate change impacts and increased production of highly traded water-intensive commodities, such as food, textiles and minerals, can further exacerbate water insecurity. The trade benefits from the agreement may also be vulnerable to climate change impacts.



According to the World Bank, the implementation of a deep regional integration agenda could generate up to 17.9 million new jobs by 2035 with up to 2.45 per cent of labour moving to expanding sectors, including energy-intensive manufacturing, construction and hospitality

services.⁵

Education and skills development

The AfCFTA provides a unique opportunity to drive demand for skilled labour and unlock its demographic dividend. However, broad sectoral shifts mask significant differences in potential skill demand across countries and regions, underscoring the need to ensure equitable access to skills development opportunities. The AfCFTA also offers an opportunity to drive the creation of regional value chains in high-potential sectors. To unlock these opportunities, policies that integrate digital and green skills development in education systems and promote digital and green entrepreneurship are essential.

However, Africa's entrenched learning crisis and skills mismatches present significant barriers to the AfCFTA's success, and additional investment in education will be required to capitalize on AfCFTA opportunities fully. Without targeted investments in education, the impact of the AfCFTA alone would be modest, increasing educational attainment to 9.9 years by 2063 compared to 9.8 years in a

no-AfCFTA scenario. The AfCFTA also carries the risk of job losses in certain sectors. In the absence of adequate social protection and active labour market programmes to smooth the transition, such shifts could jeopardize children's access to essential services and food security in affected households.

Child protection and rights

Economic growth associated with the AfCFTA is likely to raise average household incomes, reducing the need for child labour. However, the potential to increase labour demand in specific sectors (such as critical minerals or in less skill-intensive export sectors) or among families facing income or job displacement due to the AfCFTA could inadvertently lead to a rise in child labour recruitment. There are no provisions within the agreement to address this risk. At the same time, increased cross-border activities under the AfCFTA, if not accompanied by strengthened monitoring and border controls, could heighten the risk of child trafficking, including child sex trafficking.



According to IFs modelling, compared to a no-AfCFTA scenario, government revenue is projected to increase substantially under the AfCFTA, by 4.7 per cent by 2050 and 5.4 per cent by 2063. However, the region is projected to face a temporary revenue shortfall of approximately US\$6.7 billion by 2030 due to implementation of the AfCFTA.

Government revenue

AfCFTA implementation presents a complex revenue landscape for African nations, with the potential for short-term losses due to the phasing out of tariff revenues. However, the AfCFTA will be revenue-enhancing in the long term. This creates an opportunity to invest the long-term revenue gains in offsetting the adjustment costs of AfCFTA implementation, and to amplify and enhance its positive impact on economic, social and human capital outcomes, particularly for the young population.



Transformative potential through strategic investment in Africa's young population

The paper outlines three interconnected policy roadmaps that will be essential for maximizing the AfCFTA's benefits while ensuring inclusive and equitable outcomes.

Managing revenue transitions for inclusive growth

A comprehensive approach to revenue management and allocation is needed to ensure African nations can navigate the short-term fiscal challenges of AfCFTA implementation while leveraging the long-term revenue gains from the AfCFTA. This will lay the groundwork for long-term, inclusive growth which benefits the continent's young population.

Governments could consider the following:

- Short-term revenue stabilization is crucial (such as the US\$ 8 billion AfCFTA Adjustment Facility). Ring-fence a portion of the funds to scale up social protection programmes for vulnerable groups that could be negatively impacted by the AfCFTA and to ensure continuity of services.
- Being proactive in seeking to mobilize alternative revenue streams through trade. This includes introducing strategic taxation (e.g., on ultra-processed foods, whose imports could rise) and trade finance.
- Channelling long-term revenue gains into human capital development, with a focus on education, skills development and social protection (see Box 2).

BOX 2: POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF THE AfCFTA FOR AFRICA'S YOUNG POPULATION SCENARIO

The paper introduces the AfCFTA for Africa's Young Population scenario, which demonstrates how strategic investment of AfCFTA revenue gains in education, research and development, and welfare transfers could amplify the agreement's benefits.

Under this scenario:

- GDP could reach US\$29 trillion by 2063, an increase of nearly US\$3.5 trillion compared to a no-AfCFTA scenario.
- The number of people living in extreme poverty could be reduced to 71.8 million by 2063, compared to 104.3 million without the AfCFTA.
- Educational attainment could rise to 10.7 years by 2063, enabling an additional 312 million children to complete primary education, 212 million to complete lower secondary, and 131 million to finish upper secondary education.

The scenario also projects significant improvements in health outcomes, including 3.4 million fewer stunted children and 900,000 fewer malnourished children by 2063.

Strategic human capital development

By building a skilled and adaptable workforce, supported by aligned education systems and responsive labour markets, Africa can unlock new employment opportunities under the AfCFTA, drive innovation and foster growth in high-value-added economic sectors. Key strategic actions could include the following:

- Allocate a portion of AfCFTA revenue gains to the education sector to ensure sustainable and increased funding in comprehensive education reforms. Quality education systems that prioritize foundational skills development, particularly in literacy and numeracy, will be essential.
- Promote green, digital, and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) skills to strengthen regional value chains in high-potential sectors. These skills have the potential to enhance productivity and sustainability across all levels of the value chain.
- Support workforce readiness through active labour market programmes and regional collaboration in skills development.
- Work towards aligning qualification standards and skills certification across the continent to create a more integrated and flexible African labour market.

Integrating social protection and child rights

The transition to new AfCFTA-linked trade dynamics carries real potential for negative shocks. Families could face income volatility, displacement or loss of livelihoods, with children often the first to feel the impact of these events. By strengthening child-sensitive social protection systems (including implementation of Universal Child Benefits), enforcing environmental, social and governance principles, and embedding child rights into business practices, African nations can navigate economic integration while ensuring that no child is left behind.



Conclusions and recommendations

The AfCFTA presents a historic opportunity to transform Africa's economic landscape and secure a prosperous future for its young population. This analysis demonstrates that realizing this potential means going beyond trade liberalization to encompass a comprehensive economic integration agenda, strategic investment in human capital and robust social protection measures. The key messages are as follows:

- A child-centred approach to AfCFTA implementation is crucial for ensuring equitable and sustainable development across the continent.
- The AfCFTA offers significant opportunities for improving child well-being, particularly in education, employment, health, nutrition, climate and environment, and poverty reduction. Realizing these opportunities requires strategic investments and targeted policies.
- The AfCFTA also presents risks that must be managed carefully, including potential job displacement, environmental challenges and child protection concerns.

- While the successful implementation of the AfCFTA is expected to yield gains for children, these are insufficient on their own to produce transformational impacts on Africa’s young population. Investing AfCFTA revenue gains in human capital development will significantly amplify the benefits, promoting more inclusive economic growth as well as improving the health and well-being of the young population.
- The long-term success of the AfCFTA depends on complementary policies and investments that go beyond trade. By implementing three interconnected policy roadmaps – managing revenue transitions, investing in human capital and strengthening social protection – African nations can create a virtuous cycle of inclusive growth and equitable human development.

Key strategic actions to realize the full potential of the AfCFTA for Africa’s young population



Prioritize youth participation:

Engage young people in developing national implementation plans, create youth advisory boards and forums, and incorporate youth perspectives in policy formulation.

Establish robust monitoring mechanisms:

Create systems to monitor the AfCFTA’s impact on the young population, conduct child-focused impact assessments, and ensure regular reporting and transparent communication.

Foster strategic partnerships:

Promote collaboration among governments, civil society and the private sector, harness South–South cooperation for knowledge and technology transfer, and strengthen collaboration among regional economic communities.

Implement strategic investment mechanisms:

Ring-fence AfCFTA revenue gains for human capital development, establish a dedicated AfCFTA Human Capital Development Fund, and create oversight mechanisms for transparent allocation and accountability.

Strengthen governance and accountability:

Implement robust public financial management mechanisms, improve budget transparency, enhance efficiency and equity of social spending, and increase youth participation in budgeting processes.

Endnotes

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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 current and emerging questions of greatest importance for children. 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.

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for every child, answers

From Member Organisations of the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family

Enhanced Family Life

Flexible work arrangements shaping the modern workplace

1 March 2025



Flexible work arrangements (FWAs) are transforming the modern workplace, offering employees greater control over their work schedules and locations.

This paper explores the multifaceted benefits of FWAs for family life, drawing on existing research to highlight their positive impact on mitigating work-family conflict, and improving parental involvement and overall well-being. It also acknowledges the complexities and challenges associated with FWA implementation, emphasizing the need for supportive organizational cultures and policies to maximize their effectiveness.

Recommendations are suggested for policymakers, organizations, and individuals to ensure that FWAs genuinely contribute to stronger families and a more balanced life for workers.

“Flexibility regarding where and when work is completed is becoming increasingly available to employees, especially following the COVID-19 outbreak and subsequent shift in the nature of work”. [2]. Moreover, as people become more aware of the role that both family and career play in one’s personal growth and

Care work is provided through the public sector and the private sector, including micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. It is also provided by the non-profit sector and households.

The care economy, spanning formality and informality, includes, but may not be limited to, the activities of workers in education, early childhood care and education, and the health and social sectors, of domestic workers and of individuals who perform unpaid care work.

There is currently no internationally agreed statistical definition of care work and such a definition should be developed to promote harmonization and consistency of data on care, including in all applicable sub-sectors. [1]

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wellbeing, FWAs have emerged as a potential solution to alleviate stress, enhance family relationships, and promote overall well-being in situations where these two essential aspects of life find themselves competing or conflicting. Therefore, understanding the benefits and challenges associated with FWAs is crucial for harnessing their full potential to support families and create a more harmonious work-life integration.

FWAs mainly consist of what is known as Flextime and Flexplace. Flextime is the Flexibility associated with scheduling when and for how long to work, while Flexplace is associated with location, allowing one to work outside of their main workplace. [3] This way, FWAs offer a range of advantages for families, encompassing various aspects of their daily lives and having long-term well-being effects such as: reduced work-family conflict, enhanced parental involvement and hence, increased time for family and improved health and wellbeing for the working parents. Let us examine each of these briefly.

FWA advantages for families

Work and family roles often have competing demands, which can lead to work-family conflict that negatively impacts a person's well-being, family relationships, and job performance. However, FWAs can mitigate this conflict by enabling employees to better manage their time and responsibilities. A recent meta-analytic review on FWAs and employee health analysed 33 studies to the conclusion that, "FWA are associated with better physical health, reduced absenteeism, and fewer somatic symptoms, suggesting that flexible work arrangements can facilitate employees in maintaining their health" [4].

This is corroborated by the International Labour Organization's report on Work-Life Balance around the world, which states that, "A reasonable work-life balance also has significant positive effects on the psychological and physical health of employees" [5]. With less physical and mental stress, working parents are able to tackle life's problems with greater focus and peace of mind, translating to a reduced sense of work-life conflict and greater family satisfaction, improved mental health for parents, and a more harmonious home environment.

Regarding enhanced parental involvement, since FWAs provide greater flexibility and control over work schedules, they can empower both mothers and fathers to be more actively engaged in their children's lives, for example, by participating in school activities, and provide necessary care and

support. Indeed, a study showed a strong connection between flexible work policies and increased parental involvement with children, noting the benefits of flextime, flexplace (teleworking), and part-time work, but with the interesting nuance of gendered parenting roles, each of which has its own unique demands. [6]

For example, the various studies they analysed showed that mothers, working from home enjoy more frequent enrichment interactions with their children, a pattern also observed among mothers working part-time. Meanwhile, fathers benefit from flextime through greater involvement in daily routine interactions with their children, often facilitated by what they call "tag-team" parenting, where parents coordinate flexible schedules to maximize time with their children. This dynamic not only supports fathers in routine childcare but also allows mothers to focus on their careers, offering a possible explanation for why men's access to flextime positively impacts women's career opportunities, a secondary outcome that has great implications in reducing gender inequalities in society. [7]

Additionally, FWAs involving flextime and Flexplace can free up valuable time for family interaction and shared activities. By allowing employees to adjust their work schedules and reduce commuting time, FWAs provide opportunities for parents to be more involved in their children's lives, attend school events, and care for elderly family members. This increased time together can strengthen family bonds, improve communication, and create a greater sense of shared experiences.

As flexible work arrangements (FWA) gain traction worldwide, understanding their impact on work, family, and health outcomes becomes vital. As mentioned earlier, when applied effectively, FWAs promote better physical health, reduce absenteeism, and minimize somatic symptoms in employees. [8] This improved well-being has a ripple effect: healthier employees foster a more positive and energetic home environment, reducing disruptions to family life caused by illness.

At the same time, employers benefit from lower healthcare costs and enhanced productivity. Therefore, by supporting employee well-being, FWAs can create a virtuous cycle where both families and organizations benefit.

Difficulties in FWA Understanding and Implementation

Despite the numerous potential benefits, the understanding and implementation of FWAs are not

without difficulties. First is the problem of definitions and conceptualisations. Flexible Work Arrangements encompass a wide range of practices over and above flextime and flexplace, such as part-time working, term-time only working, job sharing and temporary reduction of hours, etc., leading to inconsistencies in definitions and conceptualizations across studies and organisations. [9] This lack of clarity can make it challenging to measure and compare the effectiveness of different FWA types and to develop consistent policies and guidelines.

Additionally, the effectiveness of FWAs is highly dependent on contextual factors, including national culture, social policies, organizational culture, managerial support, and family structure. For example, in countries that combine limited access to affordable childcare and strict traditional gendered parental roles, FWAs may benefit women who take on greater childcare responsibilities.

However, “women are more likely to (or expected to) carry out more domestic responsibilities whilst working flexibly, while men are more likely to (or are expected to) prioritise and expand their work spheres,” thus making FWAs discriminatory against women. [10] Conversely, in contexts where the father’s involvement in childcare is perceived culturally as being minimal, fathers may find difficulty in requesting FWAs since they are not considered primary childcare givers when it comes to parental duties.

Consequently, confusing and even unfair situations may arise in an organization due to its lack of clear guidelines and structures for FWAs. In fact, there can be “a pervasive stigma associated with the utilisation of FWA that can dissuade workers who would benefit from FWA from using them, especially if the organisation does not create a supportive environment that encourages and supports the utilisation of available FWA policies,” leading to blurred boundaries between work and family-life structures that increase stress rather than reduce it. Additionally, FWAs can lead to unintended consequences, such as work intensification, social isolation, and career stagnation, especially if not implemented thoughtfully and with adequate support [11].

Another challenge entails the difficulty of objectively measuring the direct causes and effects of FWAs. Hence, assessing the impact of FWAs on family life can be difficult due to not only the complexity of the relationships and the difficulty of isolating the effects of one type of FWA from other factors, but also the fact that research often relies on self-reported data, which can be

subject to biases. [12] Therefore, longitudinal studies are needed to fully understand the long-term consequences of FWAs, which are still too recent and not universally standardized.

Recommendations

To fully harness the potential of FWAs to enhance family life, it is important to have several things in place, beginning with clear definitions and policies. Therefore, organisations should outline the types of arrangements available for flexible work, over and above loose definitions of flextime and flexplace. They should include eligibility criteria, procedures for requesting and approving arrangements, and expectations for performance and communication.

However, since the nature of FWAs is very dynamic and context-based, each Organisation must regularly evaluate and monitor the effectiveness of its own FWAs, assessing their impact on employee well-being, family life, and organisational outcomes. This data can inform adjustments to policies and practices to maximize the benefits of the FWAs. [13]

Secondly, organisations should foster a culture that values work-life balance and supports the utilisation of FWAs. [14] This includes providing training for managers on how to effectively manage employees working flexibly, setting clear boundaries between work and personal time, and promoting open communication about work-life balance needs.

Lastly, governments should look into investing and expanding access to affordable, high-quality childcare to support working parents and ensure that FWAs do not disproportionately benefit one gender or exacerbate existing inequalities. Measures towards childcare have already been implemented in the form of maternal and paternal leave, showing that a universal minimum praxis can be established for FWAs if governments want to. [15]

Conclusion

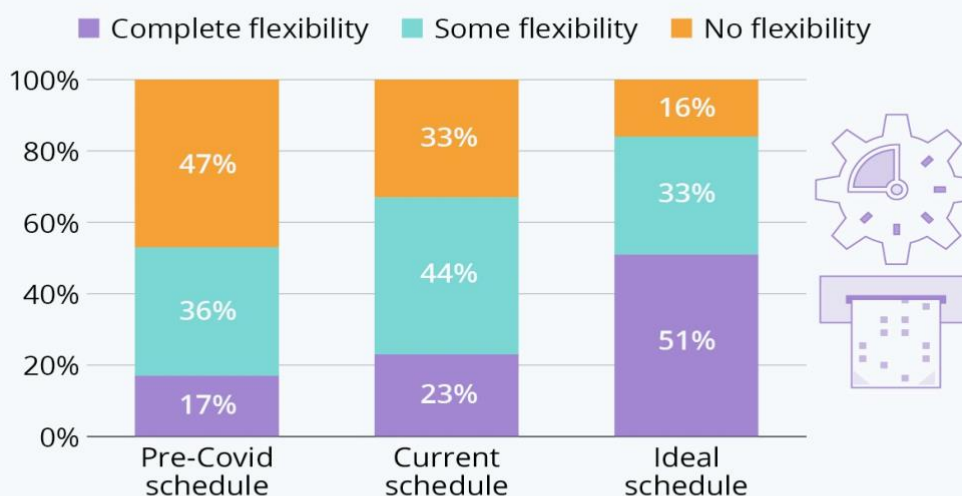
Indeed, Flexible Work Arrangements have the power to reshape how workers balance their professional and personal lives, with great benefits for the family. However, their success depends on how well they respond to the peculiar real-world complexities that each human, social, cultural and professional context brings. This requires the sensitivity of organisations and governments at large, as well as a serious investment in studying the particular needs of workers.

When done correctly, FWAs can help parents be more available for their families while still thriving at work, thus creating healthier and happier households and even making workplaces more productive and engaging, with immense benefits to society at large.

The efforts of organisations and governments to this end are worthwhile. Thus, FWAs have the potential of ensuring one's professional work and personal life, of which family is an essential element, are never conflicting realities but rather, are harmoniously combined

Does 9 to 5 Still Work in 2022?

Share of enterprise workers by actual and preferred degree of flexibility with respect to working hours



* Based on a survey of 3,404 enterprise workers from seven countries conducted between April 30 - May 28, 2021
Source: Adobe's "Future of Time" report



statista

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Make
Mothers
Matter

MMM ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE MOTHERS' ROLE AND RIGHTS

MMM Launches the State of Motherhood in Europe 2024

Make Mothers Matter (MMM) believes that when mothers speak, the world should listen.

In its *State of Motherhood in Europe 2024* report, over 9,600 mothers across 12 countries shared their stories—and their struggles. What they revealed was raw, urgent and heartbreakingly familiar: they feel unseen, unsupported and stretched beyond their limits. More than two-thirds of mothers say they are mentally overloaded. Nearly half are battling anxiety, depression or burnout.

Mothers aren't asking for praise. They are calling for policies that reflect their realities, to enable them to be part of economies that don't punish them for caring. This report isn't just data—it's a wake-up call. And it's a roadmap to rethink care and motherhood.

Before becoming mothers, 74% worked full-time. After? That number falls to 49%, with many forced to leave work altogether—because care responsibilities still fall largely on their shoulders. The findings expose the cracks in our current systems and underscore the need for change across three key action areas: the care economy, decent work and gender-transformative economies.

MMM is calling for bold, structural solutions:

- Flexible, secure jobs that value caregiving
- Paid, inclusive parental leave
- Recognition of unpaid care work in pensions
- Affordable, accessible childcare
- Mental health support that truly meets mothers where they are

MMM is presenting these findings across Europe, including at the European Parliament in September 2025. It has also unveiled these results at the 2025 UN Commission on Social Development. Because mothers matter. And it's time our systems proved it.

Watch the launch event [here](#) and read the full report and recommendations [here](#).

Beijing+30: Motherhood, the Unfinished Business of the Beijing Conference—MMM at CSW69

It has been 30 years since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action laid the groundwork for transformative changes towards gender equality and the empowerment of women. Throughout the 69th UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW69), which reviewed its implementation in March, MMM acknowledged the progress made, such as a global improvement in maternal survival, increased female literacy and economic agency, as well as an expansion in social policies and legal protections for mothers, but highlighted that there is still much that remains to be done—in particular in relation to motherhood and their disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work. It is the 'unfinished business' of the Beijing Conference.

MMM written statement to CSW69

Between 2019 and 2022, about 40% of the countries worldwide stagnated or declined on gender equality indicators. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed how much our societies depend on unpaid care work, a responsibility that disproportionately falls on women and significantly impacts their economic participation, in

particular when they are mothers. The issue of the inequitable distribution of unpaid care and domestic work—which lies at the heart of gender inequalities, and which directly relates to motherhood—has not been properly addressed by the Beijing Platform for Action.

Investing in care is investing in the well-being of society and our future. Mothers play a critical role in both the family unit and the broader economic and social fabric of communities. When they are recognised as such and adequately supported, the benefits ripple across various dimensions of societal well-being. Empowered mothers shape the future.

Our statement calls for amending the social and economic barriers mothers face. In particular:

- Unpaid care work needs to be recognised. Since it is largely invisible, assessments to measure it should be implemented and its value within the economic sector should be acknowledged and taken into account.
- Unpaid care work should be everyone's responsibility. Governments need to promote a more equitable distribution of unpaid care work between men and women—including by addressing gender stereotypes, but also across society, with governments and the private sector taking their share of responsibilities and costs.
- Unpaid care work can be lessened through an adequate support system. Governments must ensure accessible public infrastructure, educational advancement and childcare options, with extra attention and support for single mothers.

Access MMM's full written statement [here](#).

MMM CSW69 event

In its parallel event, MMM also discussed solutions to address the multiple hurdles and challenges that mothers continue to face 30 years after Beijing.

A report on this event is available in a [look-back article](#) on our website.

MMM oral statement

MMM took a stand on a crucial but often overlooked issue: the **Motherhood Penalty**. For the first time ever, MMM was invited to deliver an oral statement at the UN CSW, marking a significant milestone in its advocacy journey. In its statement, MMM emphasised that 30 years after the Beijing Platform for Action, mothers continue to bear the brunt of unpaid domestic and care work, often at the expense of their financial autonomy, career progression and long-term security.

MMM highlighted the stark reality: in many parts of the world, becoming a mother still means risking one's life. A recent MMM survey also revealed that 50% of mothers in Europe report suffering from mental health conditions. Yet, time and again, discussions on gender equality fail to acknowledge mothers, their struggles and the systemic discrimination they face.

MMM's statement was clear: failing to recognise the Motherhood Penalty means perpetuating gender inequality. MMM urged governments to acknowledge the unique discriminations and barriers faced by mothers, close the data gap, and make the Motherhood Penalty visible.

A victory: CSW69 recognises maternity-related discrimination

Last but not least, MMM's advocacy did not go unheard. The outcome document adopted at CSW69, the Political declaration on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing+30), included, for the first time, explicit recognition that maternity is a ground for discrimination. This is an important step forward—the first time maternity-based discrimination has been recognised in a UN-negotiated text. Member States are now called upon to take effective action against all forms of discrimination, including those based on maternity.

This recognition is more than just words—it is a powerful tool. By securing this acknowledgement in an

adopted text, MMM has paved the way for stronger policies that protect mothers in the workplace and beyond. The fight against maternity-based discrimination now has a formal, global framework for action.

Championing Mothers' Rights at the 58th UN Human Rights Council

The 58th session of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC58) provided a crucial platform for advocacy, engagement and collaboration on pressing human rights issues.

Voices for change: key oral statements

Throughout the session, MMM delivered five oral statements addressing critical issues affecting mothers, caregivers and children worldwide.

- **Recognising mothers to advance gender equality (General debate on Item 3):** MMM commented on the [OHCHR report on care and support](#), highlighting the exclusion of mothers—the primary caregivers worldwide. MMM urged the use of the word ‘mother’ as a necessary step to recognise the specific discrimination and challenges that mothers face in relation to their unpaid care work and responsibilities, and stressed the impact of ignoring mothers on gender inequality, women’s economic hardship and maternal mental health.

[Read MMM’s statement.](#)

“By failing to name mothers, we fail to address the unique discrimination, human rights violations and challenges they face. We also fail to leverage their power as change-makers.”

- **Migrant single mothers and the housing crisis (Item 3—Adequate housing):** MMM emphasised the growing crisis of homelessness among single mothers, particularly migrant women, who face economic vulnerability and discrimination. MMM urged policy-makers to address their unique challenges and protect their right to adequate housing.
- **Mothers, social protection and the informal economy (Panel on rights to work and on social security):** MMM advocated for universal social protection measures that support mothers, as their unpaid caregiving work and responsibilities often limit their access to formal work. MMM highlighted the lack of maternity protection for the majority of new mothers and the urgent need for policy reforms.

[Read MMM’s statement](#)—endorsed by its partner, the [Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors](#).

“Investing in social protection for mothers is a high-return investment. Mothers are the backbone of society—frontline health workers, primary nurturers and the first educators of their children.”

- **A gender-responsive approach to debt and climate crisis (Item 3—Foreign debt & human rights):** MMM stressed the disproportionate effect of the debt and climate crises on women, especially mothers, who bear the weight of unpaid care work. MMM called for systemic economic transformation that values and supports unpaid caregiving work, and redistributes responsibilities and costs.

[Read MMM’s statement.](#)

- **Early childhood development (ECD) as a human rights priority (Annual Day on the Rights of the Child):** With the endorsement of its partner [Early Childhood Peace Consortium \(ECPC\)](#), MMM championed the need for policies that recognise parents, particularly mothers, as frontline workers in ECD—including during pregnancy. MMM advocated for better support systems, including parental education and maternal mental health services, and a more equitable distribution of caregiving work and responsibilities.

[Read MMM’s statement.](#)

Spotlight on a side-event co-organised by Child Rights Connect members

[MMM's presentation](#) at the side-event, *Making Early Childhood Development Real: Stories from Grassroots to Government Action*, also focused on **the vital role of parents**—biological or otherwise—in a child's early years. MMM underscored the need for policies that ensure a nurturing family environment, promote gender equality in caregiving, and support maternal mental health. The event reinforced that supporting parents for ECD, in particular mothers, is the smartest investment governments can make in our collective future.

Giving a voice to our grassroots members from Ireland and Nepal

Two of our grassroots members, **Irish Maternity Support Network**, represented by founder and director **Liz Kelly**, and **Child Nepal**, headed up by Executive Director **Mohan Dangal**, were among the four Civil Society speakers selected to address the High-Level segment of the 58th session of the Human Rights Council.

- “Women should never face neglect, abuse or violence during childbirth,” said Liz, reiterating what a vulnerable moment this is in a woman's life. Yet far too many experience mistreatment when they need care and compassion the most. Dignity in childbirth, respectful maternity care for the more than 140 million women who give birth globally each year are fundamental rights, not a privilege.

Her vision for change: “Maternity care must be woman-centred, consent-based and evidence-based. Women must be actively involved in the design, planning and evaluation of their services.”

- Education is a fundamental right that remains unfulfilled for 251 million children across the world. Mohan stressed that “Without education, children face heightened risks of exploitation, forced labour, and early child and forced marriage, perpetuating cycles of poverty, violence and inequality”. He added: “Education is not just about classrooms—it is about ensuring that every child, regardless of gender, ethnicity or socioeconomic status, has access to quality and inclusive learning opportunities.”

He called upon governments to prioritise education, including in funding, to support teacher training and curriculum development, to champion innovative solutions using technology to bridge education gaps, and last but not least, to hold governments accountable to fulfil their commitments to education under international frameworks.

Read and listen to their statements on [Elevating the voices of our grassroots members at the UN HRC](#).

MMM Calls for Placing Motherhood at the Centre of Gender Equality

On the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted in 1995, MMM was invited to intervene at the experts' hearing organised by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). The event “EESC contribution to the EU's priorities at the UNCSW69” aimed at gathering perspectives from international organisations, civil society, researchers, and women in leadership. The goal was to review the state of play of gender equality initiatives, share best practices and identify impactful actions for the future.

The EESC's recommendations from this hearing served to inform the **European Commission and Council** in preparing the EU's priorities for the 69th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW69). These insights also guided the EESC's contributions to discussions at side-events and interactions with UN representatives, EU institutions and other stakeholders.

MMM's intervention focused on explaining why motherhood remains a central yet undervalued issue in gender equality, as highlighted by its recent survey of mothers in the EU, which was conducted in collaboration with the leading research and data analytics company Kantar.

Women, particularly mothers, shoulder the majority of unpaid care work, which is essential for the functioning of families, communities and economies. However, this work remains unrecognised and undervalued, perpetuating economic and social injustices for mothers, often referred to as the **Motherhood Penalty**.

For MMM, some of the key challenges that remain are:

1. Unequal distribution of care work

- 79% of women do daily housework, compared to 36% of men.
- Care responsibilities fall disproportionately on mothers (49% of women vs. 6% of men).

2. Economic impacts

- The gender pay gap (GPG) in the EU stands at 12.7%; the pension gap is 29%, leaving women more vulnerable to poverty, especially in old age.
- Gaps often originate with the birth of the first child and worsen with more children.
- Even in countries with strong childcare systems (e.g., France, Sweden), the GPG remains significant.

3. Financial dependency

- Many women, especially mothers, lack financial independence.
- 21% of women living in the EU as a couple depend on a single-earner partner compared to 6% of men.
- Vulnerable groups like single mothers and migrant or rural mothers face heightened risks of poverty.

4. Social and career barriers

- Mothers often take precarious, part-time or informal jobs to accommodate caregiving, which impacts their career progression, skills development, and health.

Positive aspects:

- Care work fosters valuable soft skills like empathy, multitasking and problem-solving, which can enhance social inclusion and employability. However, these skills are undervalued and unrecognised.

MMM's recommendations:

1. Recognising unpaid care work as essential to society and the economy. Introducing "care credits", for example, to fairly account for employment breaks due to caregiving; adopting a life cycle approach for carers; recognising and validating caregiving skills; promoting female entrepreneurship and business ownership as a strategic investment
2. Reducing the amount of unpaid care work through policies like affordable childcare, generous and well-paid parental leaves, and flexible working arrangements
3. Redistributing care work more equally between genders and within society, such as by supporting family-friendly policies in companies
4. Addressing the issue of time poverty. Unpaid care work leads to 'time poverty', depriving women of opportunities for decent work, financial autonomy, and participation in community life.
5. Learning from Nordic countries. While Nordic countries provide strong childcare infrastructure and progressive leave policies, persistent gender pay gaps and unequal care responsibilities highlight the limitations of current systems. Systemic change is necessary to deconstruct gender norms and redefine economic systems.
6. Adopting a well-being economy model. Redesigning economic systems around care and well-being would improve health, equity and sustainability while addressing the patriarchal roots of current models. Well-being must become central to economic priorities, focusing on care for people and the planet.

MMM believes that supporting caregiving roles, especially those carried out by mothers, is not an expense, but a *vital* investment, and the only way to ensure gender equality.

Access the [full article](#).

The New EU Gender Equality Roadmap: A Call for the Inclusion of Mothers

The European Commission's initiative on a new Gender Equality Roadmap post-2025 marks a significant step forward in addressing gender disparities across the European Union. MMM welcomes the EU's commitment to continue with its initiatives to close gender pay gaps, implement pay transparency, increase women's representation on company boards, and develop frameworks for work-life balance, as well as the strategies on care and mental health. However, MMM emphasises the need for the Roadmap to explicitly recognise and address the unique challenges faced by women who are mothers. Mothers represent a substantial part of the EU's female population and experience multi-faceted inequalities and intersectional discrimination.

Recognising the inequalities faced by mothers

Despite the EU's commendable efforts, mothers in Europe continue to confront systemic inequalities. This has been confirmed by MMM's grassroots members working with mothers and families across Europe, as well as by data from MMM's 2021 French survey of 23,000 mothers and its 2024 European survey of 9,600 mothers across 11 EU countries and the UK. These findings highlight the pressing need for a comprehensive implementation of EU frameworks at the national level, increased investments addressing gender disparities, and robust accountability mechanisms to ensure real change. National and local authorities, as well as companies, must be held responsible for making these changes a reality.

Furthermore, MMM calls for expanded EU campaigns that amplify the voices of mothers and combat the various forms of discrimination they continue to face today.

Addressing intersectional challenges for mothers

Mothers face unique challenges that intersect with other forms of discrimination. The following are among the key areas requiring urgent attention:

1. Unpaid care and domestic work

Mothers continue to shoulder the majority of unpaid care and domestic work within their families, despite various EU initiatives aimed at addressing this imbalance. This unequal distribution negatively impacts their economic security, professional growth, education, political participation and social standing. As a result,

- they experience multiple gender gaps and workplace discrimination
- their caregiving skills remain unrecognised in professional pathways
- they are at greater risk of poverty and domestic violence
- their mental and physical health is disproportionately affected.

2. Economic and financial barriers

Women, particularly mothers, are at a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion. Mothers face significant obstacles in accessing financial resources, including:

- discrimination in obtaining credit, investments and entrepreneurial support
- stereotypes that hinder their financial independence and economic empowerment
- a lack of policies that ensure economic stability for mothers, particularly those in vulnerable situations.

3. Support for vulnerable groups of mothers

Some groups of mothers experience even greater inequalities and require specific policy interventions:

Single mothers: Representing the majority of single-parent households, their numbers have increased in recent years. They are disproportionately affected by poverty, inadequate housing, over-indebtedness, discrimination, homelessness and mental health issues.

Their needs are multi-faceted, but some of the main challenges are **increased poverty and risk of social exclusion** and the greater risks of experiencing **poor mental health**.

Mothers with disabilities: They face different discriminations that limit their access to essential services, such as access to healthcare facilities and economic opportunities. Their struggles often go unnoticed and underestimated, which results in vast misconceptions and prejudices regarding their capability to provide care for their children, and leads to discriminatory practices and attitudes and to the deterioration of their mental health. In healthcare settings, biases can lead to a lack of respectful care, where women with disabilities are not treated as autonomous individuals capable of making informed decisions.

Migrant mothers: They face unique and compounded challenges that hinder their social and economic integration. They often encounter language barriers, limited access to quality employment, and a lack of awareness regarding their rights and available support services. Many migrant mothers work in precarious jobs with low wages, lacking job security and social protections. In addition, they frequently experience discrimination in the labour market and difficulty obtaining adequate housing. Cultural and systemic barriers may also limit their access to essential healthcare, childcare, and educational opportunities for their children. These challenges, combined with the pressure of adapting to a new country while caring for their families, place significant stress on their mental well-being and social inclusion.

MMM urges policy-makers to:

- fully integrate mothers' needs into all gender equality frameworks and policies
- ensure that investments reflect and address the inequalities mothers face
- strengthen enforcement and accountability measures at national and local levels
- develop targeted EU-wide campaigns to combat discrimination against mothers.

Access the EU [Gender Equality Index](#).

Read the full text [here](#).

Supporting Mothers with Disabilities: A Call for Enhanced Care and Resources

Mothers with disabilities face many challenges in a world that is physically, socially and structurally inaccessible. Their struggles often go unnoticed and underestimated, which results in vast misconceptions and prejudices regarding their capability to provide care. This leads to lack of support and poses challenges such as reduced access to healthcare facilities, deteriorating mental health and facing regular discrimination.

MMM believes that these inequalities are unacceptable and actively strives to close the gaps through research and recommendations that advocate for the rights of mothers with disabilities. An example are efforts carried out via the EU-funded project ASSIST (Healthcare Inclusion of Mothers with Disability), which focuses on promoting better education and awareness regarding the needs of mothers with disabilities, predominantly in healthcare settings.

This article outlines a few of the key issues faced by mothers with disabilities and suggests recommendations to tackle some of the challenges:

Key issues

Maternal mental health: The societal stigma, caregiving challenges and lack of support can often result in significant mental health challenges including anxiety, stress and depression.

Unpaid care work: Unpaid care work is disproportionately carried out by women, including those with disabilities. This work, which includes both physical household chores and emotional care, can be physically demanding and mentally taxing, but often goes unrecognised and undervalued.

Access to healthcare services: Mothers with disabilities often face numerous barriers to accessing quality healthcare, including physical, informational and attitudinal obstacles. Inaccessible healthcare facilities, the absence of adaptive equipment and the lack of disability awareness among healthcare professionals further isolates these women from the healthcare system.

Discrimination and bias: Discrimination remains a significant issue and is the main driver of many of the inequalities mothers face. Negative stereotypes and misconceptions regarding their ability to care for their children leads to discriminatory practices and attitudes.

MMM's recommendations

1. Promoting a more inclusive healthcare environment that adequately addresses the physical and mental health needs of mothers with disabilities
2. Developing an inclusive infrastructure that supports both caregivers and those they care for
3. Ensuring that the voices of people with disabilities and their families are promoted in policy-making and decisions regarding their rights
4. Promoting education regarding women with disabilities to tackle the discriminations they face.

Access MMM's [policy brief](#) and [report](#).

Read the [full article](#).

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

Upcoming Events

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

June

- 26. -27.; London, United Kingdom: 19. International Conference on Family Law and Children's Rights
<https://waset.org/family-law-and-childrens-rights-conference-in-june-2025-in-london>
- 26. – 27.; London, United Kingdom: 19. International Conference on Child and Family Studies
<https://waset.org/child-and-family-studies-conference-in-june-2025-in-london>

July

- 10.- 11.; Mykonos, Greece: 19. International Conference on Clinical and Health Psychology of Children and Adolescents
<https://waset.org/clinical-and-health-psychology-of-children-and-adolescents-conference-in-july-2025-in-mykonos>

August

- 07. – 08.; Lagos, Nigeria: 19. International Conference on Women, Media and Sexuality
<https://waset.org/women-media-and-sexuality-conference-in-august-2025-in-lagos>
- 14. – 15.; Barcelona, Spain; 19. International Conference on Family Planning and Reproductive Health
<https://waset.org/family-planning-and-reproductive-health-conference-in-august-2025-in-barcelona>
- 28. – 29.; Moscow, Russia: 19. International Conference on Girls' and Women's Education
<https://waset.org/girls-and-womens-education-conference-in-august-2025-in-moscow>
- 28. – 29.; Sydney, Australia: 19. International Conference on Children, Women, and Social Studies
<https://waset.org/children-women-and-social-studies-conference-in-august-2025-in-sydney>
- 28. – 29.; Dublin, Ireland: 19. International Conference on Obstetrics, Gynecology and Women's Health
<https://waset.org/obstetrics-gynecology-and-womens-health-conference-in-august-2025-in-dublin>

September

- 11.- 24.; Rome, Italy: 19. International Conference on Bullying, Cyberbullying and Family
<https://waset.org/bullying-cyberbullying-and-family-conference-in-september-2025-in-rome>
- 25. – 26.; Toronto, Canada: 19. International Conference on Women in Science, Engineering and Technology
<https://waset.org/women-in-science-engineering-and-technology-conference-in-september-2025-in-toronto>

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