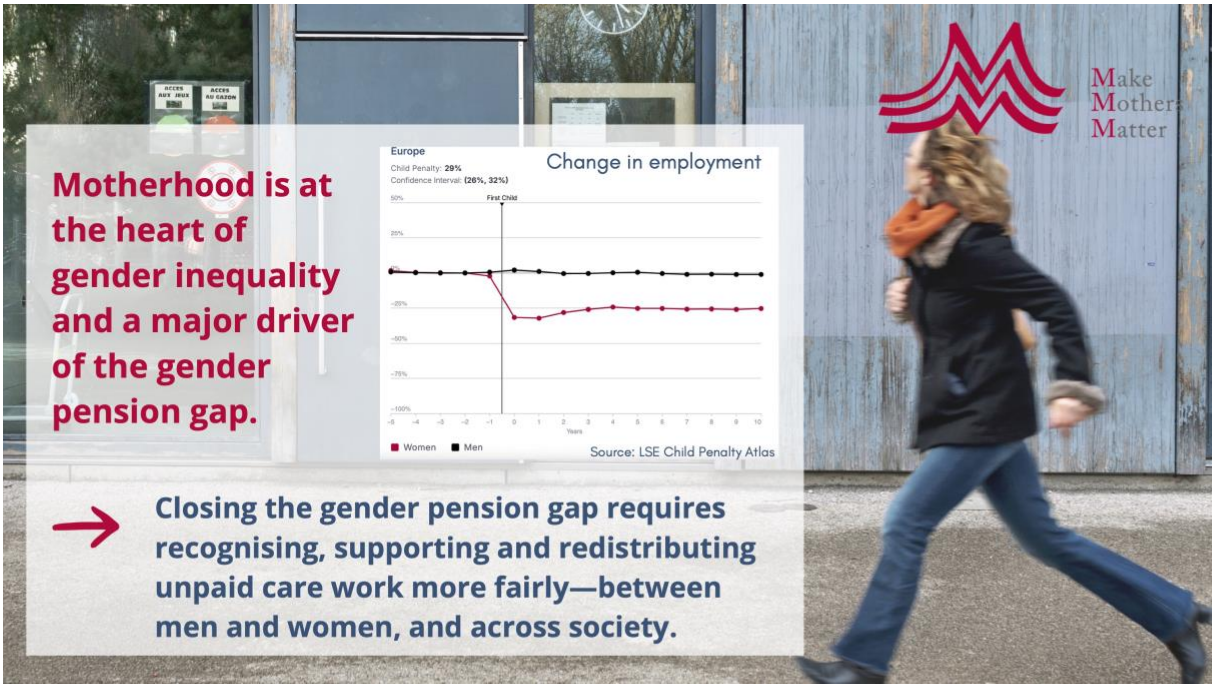
1st July 2026

HRC62 side-event on
Advancing Women's Financial Health and Pension Security
MMM presentation



I'd like to build on Alejandro's excellent presentation and his central message: the gender pension gap is indeed the cumulative result of a lifetime of discrimination and inequality.

However, I think that one point – one of these life transition - deserves particular attention: the pension gap is significantly larger for women who have had and raised children than for women without children.

Research by the London School of Economics, based on data from 134 countries, shows that women experience a sharp decline in both employment and earnings after the birth of a child. As the slide illustrates, these losses are seldom fully recovered over time.

The same research finds that, in high-income countries, motherhood accounts for around 80% of the gender earning gap. But this is only part of the broader *motherhood penalty*.

It is indeed Motherhood that often leads to career interruptions: reduced working hours, part-time or informal employment, self-employment to accommodate caregiving responsibilities; and slower career progression due to discrimination.

Over a lifetime, these interrupted careers and lower earnings accumulate, resulting in substantial wealth and pension gaps for mothers—gaps that are larger than those for women without children and tend to widen with each additional child.

So my first key message is: motherhood—and, more broadly, the unequal distribution of unpaid care work—is at the heart of gender inequality and a major driver of the gender pension gap.

How can governments address this?

Many countries have introduced compensation mechanisms, including minimum pension guarantees and so-called *care credits* in pension systems.

Care credits are widely used across Europe, although they vary considerably in design. Their purpose is to protect the pension rights of people who leave the workforce temporarily to care for a child or for an older, sick or disabled relative—caregivers who are still predominantly women. They do so by crediting pension contributions during periods of unpaid caregiving, as if the caregiver had continued to earn an income.

Care credits are generally – and at least partially – effective in preventing contribution gaps. However, while they compensate for periods spent out of the labour market, they do not make up for lower lifetime earnings or the long-term wage penalties associated with part-time work.

In other words, they can reduce the gender pension gap, but do not eliminate it. In the EU the average pension gap stands at 25% in spite of care credits.

This brings us to prevention. How can we ensure that women, including mothers, can participate in the labour market on equal terms with men?

Affordable childcare, well-paid maternity, paternity and shared parental leave, as well as flexible working arrangements are all essential. But they are not enough.

Today, mothers are often expected to work as though they have no children, while parenting as though they have no job. Unsurprisingly, this comes at a significant cost to their wellbeing.

Perhaps we should turn the question around. If motherhood and caregiving lie at the heart of gender inequality, how can we ensure that men—starting with fathers—participate in caregiving on equal terms with women?

Part of the answer is social and cultural. We must challenge gender stereotypes, change social norms, and encourage men to take on caregiving responsibilities– also for their own benefit and that of their children. Gender equality begins at home. And we, as women, also have a role to play: creating space for men to care, and raising our boys to become caregivers.

Companies also need to adapt to the realities of parenthood and caregiving, and become genuinely family-friendly. Research shows that organisations that support caregivers—both women and men—are better able to attract and retain talent while improving productivity and employee wellbeing. Employers can also play a key role in normalising men's caregiving, for example by encouraging fathers to take parental leave and by promoting reduced work time and flexible working arrangements for everyone.

At the societal level, we need to recognise caregiving for what it is: not a private issue, but a central pillar of our economies and our societies – and a collective responsibility.

So my second key message is this: recognising, supporting and more fairly redistributing unpaid care work—between women and men, and across society—is essential if we are to advance gender equality and close the gender pension gap.