



PRESIDENT

Is Target 5.4 a utopia?

Talking about Utopia, we are in the right place, here, at the United Nations, where peoples of the World meet and talk in peace...

It's a great honour for me to be here today, it's quite utopic itself, but I must admit I feel quite at home in this dimension, between dreams and hopes.

I'm a mother of 4 children and I'm a volunteer.

Last year I became president of Elfac, the European Large Family Confederation, born in 2004 to support the rights of families with 3 or more children, to protect a valid family model on its way to extinction, so widely taken for granted to be almost ignored, even by academics.

Among the five proposal Elfac is submitting to the candidates of the forthcoming European Parliament, we are asking to recognize the invisible, unpaid work of millions of fathers, mothers, carers and volunteers that every day take care of others for free. We ask to consider that work when calculating the GDP, as it's already done for many various activities, including prostitution or drug trade.

It may seem a paradox to monetize something that is priceless: the gift of time and personal energy for the wellbeing of others, but this is today's language, and we need to be understood. The unpaid invisible domestic work we do everyday is the most valuable job we can do, it gives sense to our lives, it's fundamental for each person and cannot be replaced by any institution or professional aid. It makes you feel valuable, welcome and loved, it means strong true relationships, and it has positive outcomes for the whole society.

In a large family care work has a huge impact. It requires organization, multitasking competences and several soft skills.

Among other things, I'm a cook, a maid, a driver, a psychologist, a physician, a personal shopper, a travel agent and an event organizer.

It has been calculated that a "home manager" like me could be paid around 3.500 USD.

I have no holidays, no sick days, I enjoyed no maternity leaves, I'm not going to receive a pension. I knew all this when I chose to become a "not working mom" as my third child was born. What I did not know but I soon experienced, was that my choice was not popular at all.

In spite of my "summa cum laude" I felt that if I were my children's baby sitter I would raise more respect and consideration.

Being a mother, being “just” a mother was not enough.

Even if my husband and I were investing on “human capital”, I soon understood that if you don’t produce, you don’t exist, you become invisible. And that’s not a good feeling.

I live a part of Italy where the rates of working women are similar to those of Nordic countries: social disapproval on “staying home” mothers is strong, but the economic pressure can be unbearable. Taxation is built to prevent “single earner’s families”, parents are pushed to work outside the house fulltime. Children are a poverty risk factor. Must we conclude that only rich people can have a large family and choose to stay at home to take care of it?

That sounds very unjust and unfair to me.

Everyone should be able to choose, without being judged, penalized or punished by a system that think to know better what is good for people.

I see the paradox of putting children in long hours early education centers, to let disabled and the elderly in institutions in order to work outside the house, paying other mothers or fathers to look after our people we don’t have time and possibility to follow, the paradox of migrants leaving their children and their parents at home, to follow rich people’s children and parents.

In the name of economy values, we risk to slip into a kind of slavery that is stealing us the very best of human being: maternity, paternity, caring for the people we love, leaving no one behind.

Measures to enable a country to recognize invisible work exist: some are already operating, more are being suggested.

They all go in the direction of reducing inequality and restore economic fairness for those that have dwelt in the double occupation inside and outside the house, and to provide caregivers the necessary economic independence that today is lacking.

There’s no single way, I believe every country can find its own way. But first we have to remove the social stigma regarding unpaid work of caring that is not as humiliating and degrading as we are driven to think.

While de-institutionalization is spreading in many fields and the plus of personal involvement is increasingly recognized, I believe that empowered, strong and capable families are not a limit for the economic growth but a real resources of social and economic development.

It’s only a matter of changing our paradigmas, and try to see things from another point of view, the wellbeing of children, disabled, elderly, families.

It’s a big change of perspective, a revolution and maybe it’s an utopia, but we are in the right place to start dreaming and hoping.