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UN Report on Violence Against Mothers. Special Rapporteur Sounds the Alarm: Mothers Fall Victim to Discrimination and Violence

- On May 27, 2026, the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences, Reem Alsalem, published a report entitled “Violence against mothers.”
- The document was presented on June 25 during the 62nd session of the UN Human Rights Council, held in Geneva from June 15 to July 7, 2026.
- For the first time at the UN forum, the report comprehensively analyzes the violence and discrimination that women experience because they are mothers.
- The UN expert points out that motherhood is systematically undervalued both socially and institutionally, and that mothers experience multidimensional discrimination in professional, social, and family life.
- The report emphasizes the importance of mothers’ rights, the need to take into account the biological realities of motherhood, and the need to create public policies that respond to women’s real experiences.
- The document also refers to the position of the Ordo Iuris Institute, which pointed out that motherhood is insufficiently valued and inadequately protected, both socially and legally.

The UN devotes a separate report to violence against mothers for the first time

The report “Violence against mothers” – [A/HRC/62/49](#) – is one of the most important studies prepared in recent years within the United Nations system concerning the situation of women who are mothers. The document is also the first attempt at a comprehensive treatment of the phenomenon of violence against women whose source is precisely their status as mothers. The document [was presented](#) on June 25 at the 62nd session of the UN Human Rights Council, which is meeting in Geneva from June 15 to July 7, 2026.

Already in the introduction, the Special Rapporteur indicates that the study was based on extensive research material. In preparing the report, she received 167 submissions from states, civil society organizations, and experts, including 24 submissions presented by national governments. In addition, consultations were held with 60 experts representing various fields of knowledge, and numerous scientific sources and statistical data were analyzed (para. 2).

At the same time, the report’s author draws attention to a significant problem, namely the small amount of available data on violence against mothers. This fact alone, in the expert’s view, shows that women’s experiences arising from their role as mothers remain largely invisible both in public policies and in research devoted to women’s rights.



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The report also cites the position of the Ordo Iuris Institute, which, as part of the consultations conducted by the Special Rapporteur's mandate, presented comments on the social and legal undervaluation of motherhood.

Motherhood as a unique experience of women

An important element of the report is the definition it adopts of motherhood and of the protection due to mothers. In paragraph 3 of the document, the UN expert emphasizes that the protection of motherhood arises from the very fact of giving birth to a child (including in the context of surrogacy), encompassing both the biological ("maternity-related") and the social ("motherhood-related") dimensions of being a mother. Particular emphasis is placed on the profound biological transformations in a woman's body brought about by pregnancy and childbirth – hormonal shifts, neurological adaptations, and stress responses that support caregiving behaviors. The report explicitly refers to scientific research, indicating that these changes have a direct and lasting impact on women's mental health, cognitive processes, ability to bond with the child, and psychological resilience.

Paragraph 4 specifies that mothers should be understood as women and girls who have given birth to a child, are pregnant, or have adopted a child. The protection due to biological mothers serves as the model for adoptive mothers. At the same time, the report distinguishes the role of substitute mothers ("caregivers"), who do not hold full parental rights and are not covered by the same protection. This is important because the document clearly indicates that the experience of motherhood requires special legal and social protection and cannot be reduced to merely one of many aspects of family life.

Motherhood as an undervalued social good

One of the report's main conclusions is the finding that contemporary societies largely fail to give motherhood its due value. Paragraph 7 indicates that motherhood is still perceived primarily as a woman's private choice rather than as a social good requiring recognition and support from the state and public institutions. The subject of motherhood remains largely absent from policies on the labor market, education, and diversity, as well as from contemporary feminist debates. The report cites European research according to which as many as 41 percent of mothers believe that their role is not properly appreciated by society.

Paragraph 8 of the document indicates, in turn, that women who openly declare that motherhood is their life priority are often portrayed as less ambitious or as "choosing less." Raising children itself is sometimes described primarily as a source of inequality and limitations, even though unpaid care work accounts for approximately 9 percent of global gross domestic product. The competencies that women develop through motherhood – such as organizational skills, the ability to resolve conflicts, psychological resilience, and emotional regulation – are



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very rarely recognized as valuable professional skills. In practice, this means that mothers' contribution to the functioning of societies and economies is often marginalized and remains invisible in the dominant models for assessing social and economic activity.

Intersectional discrimination and the particular situation of mothers

The report also draws attention to the phenomenon of multiple discrimination. Paragraph 10 indicates that mothers may simultaneously experience various forms of discrimination arising both from the fact of being women and from serving as their children's primary caregivers. Additional difficulties particularly affect mothers who are migrants, refugees, single mothers, adolescent mothers, women serving prison sentences, or women with disabilities. Mothers' experiences are also affected by other factors, such as age, economic situation, employment status, religion, ethnic origin, place of residence, and so on. All these circumstances may determine both the extent of the violence and discrimination experienced and the availability of support mechanisms.

The particular situation of mothers requires not only countering all forms of discrimination but also recognizing the social value of motherhood and care work. Seen in this light, many of the difficulties experienced by mothers stem from the insufficient consideration given to their family responsibilities in social policies and on the labor market. Effective protection of women's rights should include solutions that strengthen the family, support the possibility of combining professional life with raising children, and counteract the economic and social exclusion of mothers, especially those in particularly difficult life situations.

Criticism of policies and language that disregard motherhood

The Special Rapporteur's remarks on the consequences of policies and language that disregard motherhood are among the most interesting elements of the report. They indicate that effective protection of women's rights requires taking into account the fact that pregnancy, childbirth, and feeding a child are experiences specific to women and give rise to particular social, health, and legal needs. The report points out that policies which abstract from these circumstances may lead to mothers' real problems being overlooked and may hinder the creation of adequate support mechanisms. In paragraph 11, the UN expert states that policies which disregard women's specific needs arising from pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding, and which fail to take into account the special relationship between a mother and her child, make it impossible to create effective and comprehensive solutions serving the protection of women.

Paragraph 12 indicates, in turn, that approaches described as "sex-blind" – that is, approaches that disregard the significance of biological sex – are unable to respond properly to the needs of pregnant women and may lead to unintended risks to their health. One example is the lack



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of a sufficient number of hospital units for mothers and babies, which may lead to a mother being forcibly separated from her child.

Paragraph 13 of the report is of particular importance. There, the Special Rapporteur states that the use of “mother-blind” language – that is, language that disregards the category of mother – forms part of a broader process of moving away from terminology referring to women’s biological sex. This phenomenon hinders women’s access to services tailored to their real needs and blurs the specific nature of the experience of motherhood. The report also explicitly points to the increasingly frequent use of terms such as “birth giver,” “gestational carrier,” and “chestfeeding.”

At the same time, the report notes that those who criticize such solutions are sometimes portrayed as exclusionary or offensive and are exposed to social ostracism.

Paragraph 14 describes additional barriers, such as inconsistent information about complaint mechanisms and legal remedies, administrative burdens, and cuts in the funding of women’s organizations, which lead to unstable and unpredictable support for mothers.

The findings presented in the report are in line with the postulates raised for years by circles drawing attention to the need for special protection of motherhood in law and public policies. The report indicates that the effective realization of women’s rights requires recognizing the specific experiences associated with pregnancy, childbirth, and raising children, as well as taking them into account in the law-making process. In this context, it seems particularly important to preserve legal and administrative language that unambiguously identifies women and mothers as subjects requiring special protection and makes it possible to design solutions that respond to their real needs.

Harmful social norms and practices

In the section on harmful social norms (paragraphs 15–18), the report indicates that entrenched social practices, stereotypes, and the unequal treatment of women may lead to violence against mothers being trivialized and their complaints being dismissed, including in medical facilities. As an example, the report cites the situation in Afghanistan, where the systemic discrimination of women has contributed to the deterioration of the situation of mothers and children and to an increase in poverty.

The conclusions presented in this part of the report show that the protection of mothers’ rights cannot be limited solely to formal legal guarantees but also requires countering social practices that lead to their marginalization and exclusion. Of particular importance is the attention drawn to situations in which women experience violence or discrimination because of their role as mothers, while their needs are dismissed by public institutions. The report also rightly points out that the most severe violations of the rights of women and children occur where the



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protection of the family is weakened and women are deprived of real opportunities to benefit from education, healthcare, and legal protection.

Also noteworthy is the emphasis on the negative effects of phenomena such as child marriage, female genital mutilation, and other practices violating women's dignity. These practices remain irreconcilable with fundamental human rights and harm the good of both women and children. The report thus serves as a reminder that an effective policy for the protection of mothers requires unequivocal opposition to all forms of violence, as well as measures strengthening women's safety, the stability of the family, and the good of the child.

The economic marginalization of mothers

A substantial part of the report is devoted to the economic situation of mothers. Paragraphs 19–21 indicate that, according to estimates by the International Labour Organization, around 800 million women lack economic security around childbirth. Women of reproductive age often face discrimination as early as the hiring stage, because they are perceived as less available and less professionally committed. The report describes the phenomenon of the “motherhood penalty” – an economic penalty for motherhood manifesting itself in, among other things, lower wages, limited promotion opportunities, and a worse pension situation.

The Special Rapporteur emphasizes that the dominant model of the “ideal” employee, capable of performing uninterrupted work for long hours, places a particular burden on women, who on average devote more than two and a half times more time to unpaid care work than men. In some countries, such as Papua New Guinea and the United States, paid maternity leave is not guaranteed. Research covering many countries shows that a significant proportion of women leave the labor market after the birth of a child and have difficulty returning. An analysis covering 134 countries indicates that nearly 24 percent of women exit the labor market during their first year of motherhood, and after a decade 15 percent still remain outside professional activity. Similar dynamics affect adoptive mothers, though fathers to a lesser extent.

In paragraph 21, the report emphasizes that in 41 countries there is no prohibition on dismissal during pregnancy, which further deepens the economic insecurity of mothers.

Violence against mothers in the medical and family context

The report discusses in detail the forms of violence and mistreatment experienced by mothers in medical facilities, including instances of disrespect and abuse during childbirth. Attention is drawn to situations in which women's needs, the pain they feel, or the concerns they report do not meet with an appropriate response from medical staff, which can be particularly painful during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period. The report also emphasizes that mothers are not infrequently unjustly blamed for child-rearing difficulties or family problems, which can lead to additional psychological and emotional burdens.



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The findings presented confirm the importance of special protection of women's dignity during pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood. The relationship between mother and child, and the duties and challenges associated with it, require not only appropriate support from the family, but also respect and proper protection from public institutions, in particular the healthcare system. Effective assistance to mothers should be based on respect for their agency, on ensuring high standards of care, and on creating conditions conducive to the fulfillment of their family responsibilities.

Armed conflicts and violence against mothers

The report also devotes considerable attention to the situation of mothers in armed conflicts and humanitarian crises. Mothers become targets of violence because they symbolize the biological and social continuity of communities. The report describes cases of killings, sexual violence (including as a tool for altering ethnic composition), the destruction of medical infrastructure for pregnant women and children, and "reproductive violence" – actions targeting the reproductive capacities of communities. The examples come from Gaza, Sudan, Myanmar, and other regions, among others. The destruction of maternity wards and the restriction of access to medical care may lead to an increase in maternal and child mortality and constitute a particularly severe form of violence.

The report emphasizes that mothers in conflict situations are particularly exposed to multiple forms of violence, including forced separation from their children, hunger, and lack of access to basic healthcare.

Other forms of violence and discrimination

The document also analyzes domestic violence directed against mothers, including economic control, social isolation, and the sabotaging of their caregiving roles. Particular groups, such as mothers with disabilities, single mothers, and migrant women, experience overlapping forms of exclusion, which limits their ability to defend their rights and to access services.

The report describes in detail how domestic violence takes particularly severe forms against mothers, exploiting their biological and emotional bond with the child as a tool of control. Partners or family members often use economic violence – restricting access to money, preventing or hindering professional work, and taking control of social benefits intended for the child's upkeep. Social isolation manifests itself in hindering contact with family, friends, the church community, or support institutions, which deepens the mother's dependence on the perpetrator and weakens her support network. Sabotaging the caregiving role includes criticizing the way the children are being raised, interfering in everyday parenting decisions, threats to take the children away, and deliberately hindering breastfeeding and care for the newborn.



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These forms of violence intensify especially in the perinatal period, when a woman is undergoing the profound hormonal and neurological changes described in paragraph 3 of the report. Her reduced psychological resilience and increased need for stability at this time make mothers particularly susceptible to manipulation, to the long-term effects of trauma, and to postpartum depression. The report rightly notes that the lack of adequate recognition of the specific nature of motherhood in support systems deepens this problem.

Particular groups of mothers experience overlapping forms of discrimination and violence. Mothers with disabilities encounter not only architectural barriers and a lack of adapted medical care, but also stereotypes questioning their ability to fulfill the parental role, which in extreme cases leads to attempts to take their children away. Single mothers are often stigmatized as “irresponsible” or “morally suspect,” which hinders their access to stable employment, decent housing, and social support. Migrant and refugee mothers additionally struggle with language barriers, unfamiliarity with local law, the threat of deportation, and cultural discrimination, which makes them particularly defenseless against exploitation and violence at the hands of their partners.

The report also draws attention to the situation of mothers in prisons, adolescent mothers, and those living in extreme poverty or in the context of armed conflicts. In all these cases, the lack of a stable, marriage-based family environment and insufficient legal protection deepen the cycle of violence and exclusion. The document emphasizes the need for better data collection that takes motherhood into account, which would allow for more effective interventions tailored to reality.

From the perspective of protecting the dignity of women and the good of the child, it is crucial that public policies strengthen stable families based on the marriage of a man and a woman, promote responsible fatherhood, and provide mothers with real support, both material and social, without devaluing their role as mothers. Only such a comprehensive approach, rooted in the recognition of the biological and social specificity of motherhood, can effectively counteract the violence and marginalization of mothers, instead of deepening them through ideological solutions detached from reality.

Summary

The report “Violence against mothers” constitutes an important voice in the international debate on the protection of the rights of women and mothers. Its particular significance stems from the recognition that motherhood may be associated with specific forms of violence and discrimination that are not always noticed in existing human rights analyses. The document draws attention to problems such as violence and the lack of respect for women’s dignity during childbirth, discrimination against mothers on the labor market, the difficulties of single



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mothers, the stigmatization of adoptive mothers, and the particular susceptibility of mothers in difficult life situations to social exclusion.

Particularly noteworthy is the emphasis placed on the importance of the biological determinants of motherhood and on the need to take them into account when creating law and public policies. The report indicates that pregnancy, childbirth, the postpartum period, and breastfeeding generate specific health and social needs, the omission of which may lead to a weakening of the protection of women. An important conclusion is also the attention drawn to the risks associated with the use of language and institutional solutions that disregard the category of mother and the specific nature of the relationship between mother and child.

In this context, the report can be read as a confirmation of the need to pursue a social policy based on the special protection of motherhood, on support for the family, and on providing women with real assistance in reconciling family and professional responsibilities. The document is a reminder that effective protection of women's rights requires not only countering violence, but also recognizing the social value of motherhood and creating conditions that enable mothers to participate fully in social life without having to bear additional costs and burdens arising from the role they fulfill.