

## Mentioning the Family in the Sustainable Development Goals

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The most recent Report of the UN Secretary General on this topic states:

“Family policy development has not kept up with changing norms and expectations or the rising difficulties families experience in fulfilling their numerous functions. As a result, family policies too often continue to target children and/or women individually and ignore the family unit as such. Moreover, policies claiming to focus on vulnerable families often concentrate on a mother and a child, with little attention given to other family members, including the father or the grandparents. Interventions focusing on single-parent families rarely take into account the role of cohabiting and/or non-custodial parents in the lives of children.” (A/70/61–E/2015/3).

In other words, the long-standing efforts of United Nations to protect Human Rights has empowerment at its core and has been enriched during the past years with the goal of empowering the world’s women and empowering the world’s next generation—its youth. Adding families to the empowerment agenda would be another step forward.

The Post-2015 Development Agenda could remove barriers to the active participation of families in society, especially decisions on investments in health, housing, poverty, and education. The Post-2015 Development agenda could also recognize the social and economic contributions that families make to society through the time, effort and money families invest in their members—children, youth, the aging, and those who are unable to care for themselves. Because these contributions are taken for granted, there are too few incentives or supports to families for the benefits they provide to society and too little discussion of political instruments to empower families. And this step designed to help families would in return also help those who are part of families—women, children, youth, and the ageing.

In any case, we consider ‘mainstreaming’ is not the right concept, because families are already mainstreamed, they are part of every society in many ways, all societal issues relate to family and family needs, either directly or indirectly. You can mainstream a new perspective or a new approach, but not “the natural and fundamental group unit of society.” (E/RES/2014/8).

“As basic and essential building blocks of societies, families have a crucial role in social development. They bear the primary responsibility for the education and socialization of children as well as instilling values of citizenship and belonging in the society. Families provide material and non-material care and support to its members, from children to older persons or those suffering from illness, sheltering them from hardship to the maximum possible extent. [...] The very achievement of development goals depends on how well families are empowered to contribute to the achievement of those goals. Thus, policies focusing on improving the well-being of families are certain to benefit development.” (A/66/62–E/2011/4).

Consequently, to most effectively reach the SDGs, we are arguing that “we will have to do a better job in leaving no family behind.” (Sroufe et al., 2005, p. 288).

To start with, there are “four areas of relevance to the family noted by the General Assembly in resolution 64/133: confronting family poverty; promoting intergenerational solidarity; reconciling work and family life; and collecting national and regional data on family well-being.”(A/66/62–E/2011/4).

In that spirit, we suggest in the following pages to add explicit mentions to the family in the following Targets of the Sustainable Development Goals included in the Open Working Group proposal (and the latest proposed revision, March 2015):

1. Child Poverty. The new promising approach to child poverty is two-generation approaches. Instead of focusing in children and parents individually, a family approach will be used that simultaneously provides high-quality pro-grams for children and their parents.
  2. Population Ageing. Active ageing allows people to realize their potential for physical, social, and mental well-being throughout the life course and to participate in society, while providing them with adequate protection, security and care when they need it.
  3. Healthy Lives. Research shows that a family-centered approach to health care can improve the quality of care and help curb rising costs, from prevention to chronic care.
  4. Quality Education. When policies and programs are family-focused, they often are an efficient investment of public resources for promoting youth school success and an effective means for achieving lifelong learning.
  5. Unpaid Domestic Work and Care. Household production constitutes an important aspect of economic activity and ignoring it may lead to incorrect inferences about levels and changes in well-being.
  6. Domestic Violence. Gender equality and gender stereotypes, like many other values and norms, are learned in the family, and it is there where it should be first prevented.
  7. Youth Unemployment. Our societies are unable of integrating young people, leading to situations which cause young people to stop looking for a job or to work in unsuitable conditions.
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