Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, distinguished Delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

What will the future bring for families? What are the factors influencing the vulnerability of families with children?

IFFD has participated in two recent surveys directed at scientists and parents to compare opinions. The expert survey sought to gather information regarding expected changes in vulnerability of families with children and it distinguished between three different dimensions of vulnerability: economic, psychological and social vulnerability. In addition, experts were requested to rate the relevance of ten-policy components for stopping the reproduction of vulnerability within families.

Mr. Chairman,

Drawing upon the results of focus group research, ten policy measures were selected and, in general, all ten measures were expected to be important by responding experts. Four of them, however, got very high ratings:

1. Providing flexible, affordable childcare options for preschool children,
2. Organizing assistance for children with special needs,
3. Making employers aware that it makes sense to care for the work–life balance of their employees and
4. Providing education for all children already at an early age.

For each of these four measures, the experts considered them indispensable or very important to stop the reproduction of vulnerability. In line with experts, parents rated “making employers aware that it makes sense to care for the work–life balance of their employees” highest, putting “assistance for children with special needs” in third place. Participants of the family survey, however, did not agree with experts on each and every policy measure. The effectiveness of support for stay-at-home mothers was given a completely different weight: while experts ranked it (on average) in last place, parents (on average) thought it to be the second most important policy component. Another disparity concerns education: although parents stated that education at an early age and education after school and in holidays are important, they were ranked lowest among the ten policy measures.

The report ends with suggestions to observe and monitor vulnerability and—by that—improve policies. It is argued that a mainstreaming approach seems to be most promising because family vulnerability permeates numerous policy areas (labor market policies, family policies, educational policies etc.). Raising awareness of vulnerable families, vulnerable children and the problem of vulnerability transfers across generations is needed not only with respect to employers but also to society at large. This could be an appropriate field to cooperate with NGOs.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.