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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:
priority theme: strategies for the eradication of poverty to
achieve sustainable development for all**

Statement submitted by International Federation for Family Development, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

More than 25 years since the Convention on the Rights of the Child came to force and the world is still falling short in its promise to ensure the right to a safe childhood. Child poverty affects the lives of millions of children worldwide and conventional strategies are inadequate, as they do not recognize that children experience poverty differently from adults and have specific needs. As an international federation of Family Enrichment Centers present in 66 countries, IFFD is committed to contribute to the well-being of children worldwide, from a physical and psychological perspective.

The importance of psychological well-being in children and young people, for their healthy emotional, social, physical, cognitive and educational development, is generally recognized. There's an increasing evidence of the effectiveness of interventions to improve children's and young people's resilience, promote mental health and treat mental health problems and disorders, including children and young people with severe disorders.

We need active measures to support the psychological well-being of children and youth with sensitivity to family situations (prevent violence, addictions and juvenile delinquency). Also, promote school to work transitions and young adults' economic security to facilitate family formation and stability, particularly among those with insecure socio-economic resources.

The following are key issues for identification and promotion of children's mental health and psychological well-being:

1. Belonging

Successfully achieving a sense of belonging in institutions, such as schools, can have a positive impact on a range of important outcomes, including engagement with learning, emotional well-being and happiness. A sense of "not belonging" may lead to disaffection, disengagement from learning, depression and anxiety. When they feel excluded, they may be at greater risk of seeking a sense of belonging through anti-social groups, such as gangs or extremist organizations. And where problems of engagement and belonging are a feature of schools, these are likely to be manifested in increased risk of poor behaviour, poor attendance, underachievement and bullying.

2. Distress

Common, transitory distress, even if severe, is a normal experience of childhood and usually does not require professional help. Although usually temporary in nature, distress can however also be more chronic and longstanding. Current estimates indicate that one in ten children and young people aged between 5 and 16 years in the UK experience symptoms, which cause them considerable psychological distress. In some cases, long-term outcomes can be serious and without intervention, these difficulties can persist into adulthood with considerable implications for the individual, those close to them and wider society.

3. Enjoyment

Empowering children to enjoy their childhood and school life is an aim that should be up-held by all those who work with children. There are certain expectations in relation to “enjoyment” and the duty to promote the well-being of their pupils. Whilst objective indicators are available to assess attendance, standards of behaviour and rates of further education, they can do little to confirm subjective levels of enjoyment.

4. Healthy Living

Health promotion has become a hot topic, particularly for schools, and research has consistently demonstrated that healthy living is associated with positive outcomes. For children and young people, healthy living is important for healthy growth, cognitive development and psychological well-being, and habits learnt during childhood often continue into later life. There is also a positive relationship between diet and regular physical activity with social skills, positive self-esteem and good quality peer relationships.

5. Resilience

Resilience is not simply putting up with life’s adversities, or being able to cope with them — it’s the capacity to get up after being pushed over and to tolerate great challenges without breaking down under the strain they impose. School life can offer vulnerable pupils a wide range of opportunities to boost resilience, such as acting as a secure base, helping to developing self-esteem and self-efficacy, and providing constructive contact with peers and supportive adults.

6. Responsiveness

“Responsiveness” is a term used to describe the range of behaviours that children must show to successfully participate in activities with their peers and other individuals in a prosocial way. Empathy, altruism, self-awareness and relationship skills are all facets of responsiveness.

7. Social Behaviour

A child’s psychological well-being can be great enhanced by the breadth of quality of their social relationships. The behaviours that children display towards other children, their feelings about themselves and their sense of self-worth (particularly in school) can all reveal valuable indicators of their overall mental health and well-being. Social behaviour also plays a huge role in the classroom and can both aid and hinder learning and progress.

The role of the family

Often, low-income families have few possibilities of improving their living conditions. Individuals do not choose to live in poverty and they struggle to make ends meet. Blaming them for being inadequate or lazy is insensitive and pointless. In many cases they come from a background and culture of poverty and many of their children are disadvantaged in their upbringing.

There is also a good deal of evidence on the links between a range of negative family outcomes and experiences of poverty. Evidence across developed countries generally agrees that children from poor households are more likely to grow up

poor, experience unemployment, to have lower levels of education, and to experience a range of poor health outcomes and engage more often in many risk factors. Poverty has been linked to family breakdown, parental (particularly maternal) depression, social exclusion, and the take up of publicly provided family services.

The role of local authorities

What can local authorities achieve by promoting the social and emotional well-being of children and young people?

1. Improve the population's health and well-being

Social and emotional well-being is influenced by a range of factors, from individual make-up and family background to the community within which people live and society at large. Social and emotional well-being provides personal competencies (such as emotional resilience, self-esteem and interpersonal skills) that help to protect against risks relating to social disadvantage, family disruption and other adversity in life. Such competencies provide building blocks for personal development, which will enable children and young people to take advantage of life's chances.

2. Reduce mental health problems in children and young people

Evidence shows that poor social and emotional well-being predicts a range of negative outcomes in adolescence and adulthood. For example, negative parenting and poor quality family or school relationships place children at risk of poor mental health. Early intervention in childhood can help reduce physical and mental health problems and prevent social dysfunction being passed from one generation to the next. Recent surveys identified that 10% of children and young people aged 5-16 had a clinically diagnosed mental disorder. Older children (11-16 years) were more likely than younger children (5-10 years) to be diagnosed as such (12% compared with 8%).

3. Improve social and economic outcomes

For children and young people with poor social, emotional and psychological health there is an increased likelihood of poor socio-economic outcomes, in both the short and long-term. For example, children with behavioural problems are more likely to leave school with no qualifications, become teenage parents, experience relationship or marital problems and experience unemployment in adulthood.

4. Reduce demand on services

For children and young people with poor social, emotional and psychological health there is an increased likelihood of criminal behaviour and higher risk behaviour's such as substance misuse, lower levels of social interaction and poor mental health, outcomes that may continue into adulthood.

5. Promote educational attainment and reduce bullying and risk-taking behaviour among pupils

The emotional well-being of children and young people is enhanced through building self-esteem and self-efficacy, reducing bullying behaviour and risk-taking behaviours, and supporting the development of social and emotional skills. This

may also improve all pupils' interest in their learning, lead to better school attendance and improve attainment.

Recommendations for governments

The complex and varied policy frameworks found in rich countries mean that many different pathways for reducing bottom-end inequality exist. But research suggests that children do better, families do better, and countries do better when nations invest in early childhood programs. The following principles and recommendations for governments should be considered in strengthening child well-being:

1. Protect the incomes of households with the poorest children

Boosting employment opportunities for parents, implementing progressive taxation and effective service provision all have a role to play. However, it is evident that large income gaps tend to go hand in hand with less-extensive social transfer systems.

2. Focus on improving the educational achievements of disadvantaged learners

The Convention on the Rights of the Child requires recognition not just of the right to education, but also “achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity”. This means preventing children from failing far behind in their educational achievement. Evidence from the PISA surveys shows that there is no inevitable trade-off between reducing achievement gaps and overall outcomes.

3. Promote and support healthy lifestyles for all children

Promoting healthy lifestyles at an early age is likely to pay short and long-term dividends, but the fact that such large relative child health gaps exist in many countries is a cause for concern. This is particularly so for inequalities in physical activity, given that these seem more tightly bound to inequalities in income. This would suggest that there is particular scope for governments to do more to open up opportunities for less-affluent children to participate in physical activity in and out of school. Evidence from the “European Union statistics on income and living conditions” shows that low income is a barrier to participation in extracurricular activities in European schools.

4. Take subjective well-being seriously

Data gathered over a period of more than 10 years for the “Health Behaviour in School-aged Children” survey shows stable patterns of inequality in children's life satisfaction. While this stability confirms that subjective well-being data reveal meaningful information about children's lives in rich countries, the fact that some countries have had persistently large gaps is a cause for concern. Moreover, the findings that children with low life satisfaction are more likely to be exposed to risky health behaviour's and outcomes underlines the fact that subjective well-being also matters for health and education.

5. Place equity at the heart of child well-being agendas

The leave-no-one-behind principle should form the foundation of future social strategies. The evidence suggests that to improve overall child well-being the most disadvantaged must not be ignored. Better monitoring and measurement of child

well-being. Producing better data for informed public debate and a more comprehensive picture of child well-being is essential.

6. Improve the availability, timeliness and usefulness of information about the well-being of children in rich countries

As part of this process, governments and national statistical agencies should continue to work together more closely to harmonize surveys, wherever possible, in order to allow for fruitful cross-national comparison of child well-being outcomes and to foster cross-national policy learning.

7. Data sets should track children through different stages of their life

Such analysis is particularly powerful for an exploration of the temporality of child well-being and the factors that shape child well-being. Governments should increase their support for these longitudinal data sources.

8. Children's voices should be built into data-collection processes

While children's voices are heard more clearly than ever before, further efforts can still be made to capture child-derived measures of well-being more systematically and to understand better the particular contexts in which child well-being improves and worsens. Children need to be able to shape the questions asked in surveys of their own lives and well-being.
