



# Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
29 November 2017

Original: English

---

## Commission for Social Development

### Fifty-sixth session

31 January–7 February 2018

**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 the 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

### **Families in Europe: Key Findings and Policy Recommendations to Eradicate the Intergenerational Cycle of Poverty**

Since February 2013, the International Federation for Family Development has been part of a large-scale integrating project called FamiliesAndSocieties. It has served to address changing families and sustainable societies, policy contexts and diversity over the life course and across generations. The collaborative research project coordinated by Stockholm University has been financed in the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme to extend the knowledge on how policies promote well-being, poverty eradication, inclusion and sustainable societal development among families.

The main objectives of the project include investigating the diversity of family forms, relationships, and life courses in Europe; assessing the compatibility of existing policies with family changes; and contributing to evidence-based policy-making. The conceptual framework has embedded four transversal dimensions such as Gender, Culture (ethnic and cultural identities, sexual orientation), socioeconomic resources and life stages. The interactions between these transversals with the fundamental processes shape the outcomes of the diversification of family life courses for individuals and societies; intergenerational cycle of poverty and (re-)produce inequalities across the life course and across generations; and shape the policy responses that are appropriate to promote positive objectives. Relying on this conceptual framework informed by a multidisciplinary approach, the project engages with the growing complexities of family configurations and transitions within and across European countries, along with their implications for men, women and children with respect to poverty and inequalities in life chances, intergenerational relations and care arrangements. How current policies address family diversity, and identifying future policy needs based on an integrated foresight activities approach, are also focuses within the project.

Thanks to a multidisciplinary approach, the project has combined a wide range of highly qualified expertise in social sciences, law and the humanities represented in the consortium of experts representing 25 research partners located in 15 countries, in addition to the participation of three transnational civil society actor organizations including our Federation. The countries represented in the consortium covered four geographic areas: Northern Europe (Sweden, Finland, UK), Western Europe (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland), Southern Europe (Italy, Spain) and Central-Eastern Europe (Estonia, Hungary, Poland, Romania). These countries also represented different welfare state and care regime models: the universal Scandinavian welfare regime (Sweden, Finland), the liberal regime (UK, Switzerland), the conservative welfare regime (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands), Mediterranean familialistic regime (Italy, Spain) and transition post-socialist welfare regime (Estonia, Hungary, Poland, Romania).

The consortium sought to achieve these main objectives by fulfilling five additional specific research aims: to explore the complexity of European families; individual goals, attitudes, decisions and trajectories; to gain insight into the differences in family situations and dynamics across European nations, and cultural and socioeconomic groups within nations; to examine the implications of family change for social relations, care, poverty, well-being and inequality; to analyse how policies address family diversity and its consequences; and to identify the likely paths of future changes in family compositions and needs to support policy-makers and stakeholders.

The analyses reveal the dynamic nature of families and family life over the life course, shedding greater light on the role of socioeconomic resources for family careers and their intersections with gender, culture and life stage. Family constellations with heightened risks for vulnerability, poverty and exclusion, namely: single parent families, large families, living-apart-together partnerships and stepfamilies, etc. are also highlighted in the project. The reconciliation of paid work and family life is a dimension shown to be of crucial importance for the well-being of families and children, enabling societies to counteract the reproduction of vulnerability and the intergenerational cycle of poverty. The examination of family dynamics among immigrants and their descendants reveals a remarkable diversity of partnership patterns and family forms, shaped by both mainstream society and minority subcultures.

The ways by which gender and family changes become intertwined are highlighted in the project, as now both women and men engage in earning as well as caring activities. This trend is often reinforced by increasing employment instability and precariousness, impeding any convergence to a singular pattern of family life courses within and across countries. A focus on new parents shows that the birth of a child is one among many turning points leading to changes in the distribution of care work in couples and the gendering of parenting roles. Analyses highlight the significant benefits children of lower-educated mothers, and those from disadvantaged backgrounds in general, gain from formal childcare compared to home-based care; and the positive association between maternal education and childcare usage and child outcomes. With respect to the implications for child well-being of non-standard family arrangements, changes in family structure per se are not the main determinant as to negative outcomes for children. A more pronounced negative association between parental separation and children's educational attainment surprisingly exists in cases of children with more advantaged backgrounds. The associations of non-traditional family forms with child outcomes are relatively modest compared to other characteristics, such as parental education and income.

Critical interdependencies between family generations, and between men and women within families, as constructed in the daily interactions between family members, and built and reinforced by social policies, entail that the type of public social provision offered has consequences for gender and socioeconomic inequality. Cash payments strengthen a gendered division of tasks as compared to offering care services. The primacy of family members in legal arrangements can constrain interdependence between the childless and their network members, and there are strong contrasts between the actual family roles of men and women related to differences between de jure and de facto practices. The expansion of private care markets contributes to poverty, social inequalities, rendering them less likely to provide a viable solution to meeting the increasing care needs of aging societies.

The project contributes to broadening and improving the availability of comparative indicators of family-related policies. Significant cross-country differences are shown in terms of types of support, risks targeted, coverage and receivers of public aid to young adults to facilitate leaving the parental home, setting up an independent household and starting a family. Parental leave use by fathers indicates beneficial impacts to second childbearing and reducing partnership dissolution.

Regarding the evidence, three new databases have established within the project: i) Assisted Reproductive Technologies regulations (ARPNoVA), ii) legal family formats available for same-sex and different-sex couples in Europe (LawsAndFamilies Database), and iii) family-policy initiatives of the European

Union (EUFamPol) related to fertility, which cut across core aspects of family life, such as employment, care and gender.

FamiliesAndSocieties is organized into twelve interrelated and complementary work packages (WP). The first two work packages, management and dissemination, served all the working papers providing a frame for the research activities. The main topics that the research focused on are: important aspects of the family life course (WP2–4), new family configurations, life goals and transitions (WP2), the new roles of women and men (WP3) and the new role of children, and more specifically, childlessness and ART (WP4), implications of family life course changes for sustainable societies by focusing on poverty and inequalities in children's life chances (WP5), childcare arrangements, determinants and consequences (WP6), intergenerational links (WP7), migrants and questions of social inclusion and exclusion (WP8), and policies (WP9). The last two working packages focus on a foresight and the synthesis of research results. Two working packages, on family configurations and on policies, are central and interlinked with the other WPs. The new gender roles are interlinked with children and ART and intergenerational links, in addition to links with the two central working papers. Children and ART and intergenerational links are also interlinked with childcare arrangements, determinants and consequences. Research on children's life chances is interlinked with both childcare arrangements, determinants and consequences, and migrants and questions of social inclusion and exclusion

This statement discusses the main findings of the FamiliesAndSocieties project key, addressing first the growing diversity of family life courses and their main mechanisms of change. Then it focuses on linked lives and interdependencies through the lens of changing gender and intergenerational dependencies. Last, societal and policy contexts are addressed, those in which family transitions and everyday decision-making takes place, as influenced by institutional and policy settings.

### **Key policy recommendations**

The following key policy recommendations are highlighted for policymakers and based on main findings of the project:

- Policy makers ought to be aware of the remarkable diversity of family forms and relationships in contemporary Europe, and aim for a better understanding of the nature and mechanisms of family constellations beyond married couples with children.
- Policy measures aiming to prevent/reduce the reproduction of vulnerability, poverty and exclusion in families ought to be broad, complementary and embedded into a comprehensive strategy. They should comprise services addressing the needs to particularly vulnerable children as well as reconciliation policies, educational policies and other policy measures.
- More direct supports to youth are needed in most European countries, with the state playing an active role in enabling young people in their transition to adulthood. Financial independence is fundamental. However, the achievement of self-sufficiency is a process preferably supported with a social package encompassing education, housing, job market access, family benefits and social aid.
- Law, policies and practices have to assess the effects of any privatization or transfer of care (for children, the elderly, frail individuals) back on the family as to all persons concerned, those receiving the care and the caregivers. Reconciliation of care and work should be supported by implementing care

leaves not limited to young children, reducing working hours and allowing for greater flexibility in work time for adults in need.

- To be able to design policies for sustainable societies we need to extend our knowledge on the new roles of men and women and their implications for families and societies. Family-friendly policies, such as parental leave, should consider both parents, as each of their time investments matters for child development. Affordable childcare, out of school care and recreation should be available, given the positive association between formal childcare and positive child outcomes, which is stronger for children living in more disadvantaged environments. Early and universal access to formal childcare is also one of the most efficient interventions to reduce disadvantages among immigrant children.
- Education and information are key policy issues. Education of children reduces inequality in children’s life chances when they reach adulthood. Information and counselling for parents helps them to cope with parental roles, and raising awareness of employers — and society at large — enhances the understanding of challenges faced by parents.
- Both labour market and family policies aimed at better reconciliation of work and family responsibilities are required to be supportive for the reallocation of paid and unpaid work between women and men, to diminish gender inequality in economic positions across the life course, and to promote rewarding contacts between generations. Policies aimed at reducing social and economic inequalities that favour the reconciliation of family life, private life and professional life will also help reduce children’s disadvantages and challenges associated with parents’ divorce or separation.

In a nutshell, the main key findings and policy recommendations derived from the research conducted within the project will help policymakers to better address family perspective legislation in the multilateral discussion. The policies should acknowledge the diverse situations of families; gender equality and social equality are necessary aspects of societal sustainability; and economic, social and legal security are crucial for the well-being of families and individuals in Europe.

---