

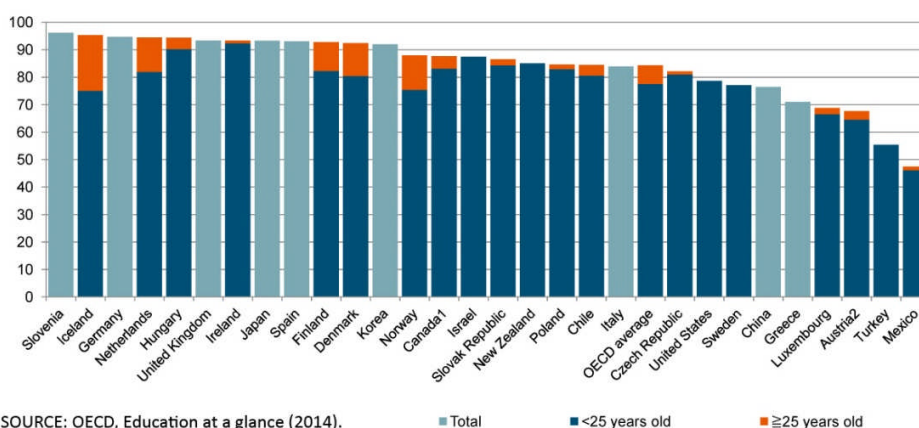
## Mentioning the Family in the Sustainable Development Goals

### 4. Quality Education

**Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all**

#### Upper secondary graduation rates

Year of reference 2011



**How do Families Contribute to Quality Education and Lifelong Learning?** Few would question that families are a child's first and foremost teacher. Yet policymakers seldom incorporate family considerations in their policy discourse and decision-making on quality education and lifelong learning.

The science on the importance of families to lifelong learning is solid. For example, in a 30-year longitudinal study in the United States, Sroufe and colleagues (2005) were able to predict which children would drop out of school with 77% accuracy using only one variable—quality of care up to age 42 months. Well before these children started school, researchers were able to predict the probability of becoming a high school dropout 11 to 14 years later. The odds of dropping out of school were even greater when parents were neglectful or disengaged. Similarly, educational attainment by age 23 depended on young adults' early and cumulative history. Based on the quality of early care, researchers could also predict which children would return to high school or obtain a high school equivalency degree.

Children's early experiences proved to be powerful predictors of later development in a number of other ways that are valuable to employers and society (Sroufe et al., 2005). For example, in longitudinal studies in the United States, the attachment relationship between a mother and infant was significantly related to a number of qualities at ages 15 and 16 that most employers and societies would value – involvement, leadership, self-confidence, and social competence in problem-solving situations (Englund, Levy, Hyson, & Sroufe, 2000).

When children enter school, families continue to be an important influence on learning. When parents are engaged in their children's schooling, students get better grades, score higher on standardized tests, have better attendance records, drop out less often, have higher career aspirations, and hold more positive attitudes toward school and homework. Moreover, these positive impacts are more powerful for children growing up in disadvantaged and highly stressed families (Steinberg, 1996).

**How Can Policy Support Family Contributions to Lifelong Learning?** Policymakers could acknowledge families and take them into account when laws are drafted, programs designed, and services implemented. We propose three strategies for doing this. First, policymakers could take steps to build stronger family relationships at the time children are conceived and born. Evidence-based programs are available, often carried out through home visits, which teach parents how to form secure attachment relationships with their children by being reliably available and responsive to them (Bernard, Dozier, Bick, et al., 2012; Olds, et al., 1997; 1998).

Second, policies that support family's breadwinning responsibility also benefit their children's ability to learn. For example, studies in three countries have shown that investing in the employment of parents, particularly in fragile families, improved children's school performance and (sometimes) their social development as well (Berlin, 2007).

Third, policymakers could more systematically incorporate families into the design and implementation of any policy or program. When programs are implemented, family involvement proved pivotal in a meta-analysis of 47 studies from 7 countries with 11,000 participants involved in programs and services such as elementary school, preschool special education, family support programs, mental health services, neonatal intensive care units, rehabilitation centers, etc. The family-centered approaches proved relatively more effective for all outcomes; participants had stronger self-efficacy beliefs and higher ratings of child behavior, parenting behavior, and adult and family well-being (Dunst, Trivette, & Hamby, 2007).

Even in the countries like the United States where families are widely seen as the most important institution in society (Strach 2006; 2007), a famine of political attention is paid to the family concept. Fewer than 10% of U.S. federally funded, early child care and education programs incorporate comprehensive approaches that include family social services, parental support, and medical care and referrals (Reynolds & Temple, 2005). During primary and secondary education, family engagement tends to be general and aspirational (Epstein, 2011); only three states explicitly require specialized training on parent involvement for administrators, staff, or teachers (Education Commission of the States, 2005).

Based on a growing body of evidence, when policies and programs are family-focused, research affirms they often are an efficient investment of public resources for promoting positive child and youth school success, and an effective means for achieving lifelong learning.

This information is adapted with permission from Karen Bogenschneider's book, 'Family Policy Matters: How Policymaking Affects Families and What Professionals Can Do' (3rd edition). New York, NY: Routledge Books, Taylor and Francis Group. (See Chapter 8 of the book for a more complete discussion).

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