

1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of the stability of the family – “the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members”¹ – becomes increasingly evident as the negative consequences of its absence continue to relentlessly manifest themselves. “Stable and healthy families are the foundation of strong societies, when family breakdown, the costs are high, societies suffer and the role of government tends to expand.”²

Since 1978, the International Federation for Family Development (IFFD) has been working to promote and support different kinds of initiatives which aim to bolster and strengthen the family. Our experience in family matters has shown us time and again that the best solution is not to replace families’ social functions, either via the state or other institutions, but to try to support and empower families to carry out these functions in their own right. “Governments cannot afford to fully replace the functions families perform for the benefit of their members and for the good of society. The family is the most powerful, the most humane and, by far, the most economical system known for building competence and character. Still, families do better in a supportive policy environment—one in which, for example, schools actively seek parental engagement; employers recognize that workers are also family members; agencies and organizations are family-centered in their philosophy and operation; and laws support family members’ roles as caregivers, parents, partners, and workers. A vital role remains for government to supplement and complement the private investments families make. Policies and programs, along with community institutions and societal norms and values, shape the extent to which families can fulfill their functions and develop new capabilities when challenged to do so”³.

In other words, state intervention is effective when it does not replace the family, but rather plays a role in designing policy and public assistance programs, because it can no longer be taken for granted that couples will decide to have children. For various reasons, it is important to reward, in some measure, those people who do decide to have and bring up children, in contrast with those who prefer not to and therefore have more resources. Both groups will end up benefitting in equal measures from the future of these children, who will eventually become the professionals needed to ensure that society continues to function and, in many cases, that the fiscal system remains balanced. The time, effort and money that families invest in their children should receive some form of

¹ Resolution of the Human Rights Council, 2012/26.

² Concept Note for the Doha International Conference on the Family, 16-17 April 2014.

³ Karen Bogenschneider, Olivia Little, Theodora Ooms, Sara Benning, and Karen Cadigan, ‘The Family Impact Rationale - An Evidence Base for the Family Impact Lens’, Policy Institute for Family Impact Seminars, 2012.

social and economic return from the society that will benefit from it, via political measures that encourage and reward the 'generosity' of these families. On the other hand, as well as a context that promotes maternity, it is also necessary to have guarantees of stability, as the example of France demonstrates.

IFFD has participated in the preparation of several documents in United Nations. We have also contributed to the 20th Anniversary of the International Year of the Family by organizing, in conjunction with the UN Focal Point on the Family, Expert Meetings and other events in Spain, Poland, Belgium, Chile, Nigeria, Kenya, Brazil, Argentina, Costa Rica and Mexico, and have coordinated other events and activities in the headquarters in New York and Geneva, including the official celebration of this Anniversary.

IFFD has also carried out several communication projects to promote the family perspective in governments and international organizations, and has set up a website with all the relevant information about the 20th Anniversary of the International Year of the Family: www.familyperspective.org.

A. FAMILY POLICY IN THE UN CONTEXT

The IFFD, in cooperation with the United Nations DESA Focal Point on the Family have organizing a North American Expert Group Meeting under the theme of 'Confronting family poverty and social exclusion; ensuring work–family balance; advancing social integration and intergenerational solidarity in North America.' The meeting was convened as part of celebrations for the Twentieth Anniversary of the International Year of the Family, 2014.

One of the objectives of the 1994 International Year of the Family (IYF) and its follow-up processes is a sustained, long-term effort to strengthen national institutions to formulate, implement and monitor policies in respect of families. In its resolutions 62/129 (2007) and 60/133 (2005), the General Assembly has encouraged Governments to continue to make every possible effort to integrate a family perspective into national policy-making. In particular, the General Assembly recommended that the United Nations agencies and bodies, intergovernmental and non-governmental institutions, research and academic institutions and the private sector play a supportive role in promoting the objectives of the International Year and contribute to developing strategies and programmes aimed at strengthening national capacities. The 2010 General Assembly resolution⁴ encouraged member States to adopt holistic approaches to policies and programmes that confront family poverty and social exclusion and invited Member States to stimulate public debate and consultations on family-oriented and gender- and child-sensitive social protection policies.

⁴ A/RES/64/133.

One of the Economic and Social Council's resolutions on the 'Preparations for an observance of the Twentieth Anniversary of the International Year of the Family'⁵ noted the importance of designing, implementing and monitoring family-oriented policies, especially in the areas of poverty eradication, full employment and decent work, work family balance, social integration and intergenerational solidarity. The resolution further encouraged Member States to continue their efforts to develop appropriate policies to address family poverty, social exclusion and work-family balance and share good practices in those areas.

In addition, the resolution adopted in July 2012⁶ invited 'Member-States, non-governmental organizations and academic institutions to support, as appropriate, the preparations for regional meetings in observance of the Twentieth Anniversary of the International Year of the Family.'

The Expert Group Meeting was convened in response to above mentioned resolutions.

B. FAMILY POLICIES

Like family itself, family policy is not easy to define. Family policies differ in content, scope and target. Some define it broadly as Government's actions to benefit the family. Family-friendly policies can also be enacted by private institutions and come from civil society organizations. Often family policies benefit only families with children while those caring for adults, e.g. older persons are thus excluded. Frequently, family policies are also confined to economic issues, disregarding other aspects of family functioning.

Implicitly, family perspective in policymaking considers the impact of policies and programmes on the well-being of families, including family stability, its economic prosperity and the ability to carry out its numerous functions. Explicit family policies aim to support family well-being directly, e.g. through the provision of child benefits or tax incentives.

It has been often observed that family policy should aim to help families perform their various functions, including economic support, childrearing, nurturing and educational roles as well as caregiving to all family members, young and old. To support those functions, policies should aim at reducing family poverty and social exclusion; ensure minimum standards of social protection; prevent intergenerational transmission of poverty; focus on multiple aspects of child well-being; attempt to reconcile work and family life, as well as support intergenerational strengths and various care arrangements within the family.

⁵ 2011/29.

⁶ 2012/10.

The assessment of family policies at national and regional levels is necessary in order to improve policy performance. Despite the need for evidence-based design, implementation and monitoring of family-oriented policies, there have been but a few attempts to assess them in a comprehensive way. A recent assessment has been provided by an OECD team of researchers who compiled a comprehensive list of indicators including the provision of family-related leaves, early childhood education and care and family benefits as well as work-family reconciliation programmes provided by employers within a framework of three main family policy goals: child wellbeing, gender equality, and balancing of work and family life.

There is a need for more assessments of this nature to inform policy makers of the effects of social policies and family policies in particular on the well-being of families at national and regional levels. It is especially important in the context of current disconnect between research and policy.

C. CONFRONTING FAMILY POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Family-oriented and gender- and child-sensitive social protection policies addressing family poverty and reducing the vulnerability of younger and older generations have been increasingly mainstreamed in the overall development efforts. In particular, income transfer programmes sustaining the poorest families are indispensable to changing the structure of opportunities and are key to reducing the intergenerational transfer of poverty and inequality.

Family benefits such as child allowances and social assistance play an important role in addressing short term experiences of poverty, and going some way to stopping families employing their savings or using debt. For longer term solutions to poverty risks, investments designed to equip families with the necessary skills and tools for good and sustainable employment are necessary.

The vast majority of jobless families, in all of the developed countries, will live in poverty due to the low levels of welfare benefits in developed countries. Although increasing these benefits may create a new set of welfare dependency problems, and paying above poverty rates for any significant length of time might be undesirable (benefits could be reduced over a period to increase work incentives, whilst effectively combating poverty risks in short periods outside of the labour market), higher levels of cash benefits are undeniably one way to reduce poverty risk in the short term.

To complement short term poverty reduction strategies through cash benefits, strategies such as employment support programs in high unemployment areas, or in-work training, or targeted minimum wage legislation, in areas with high levels of in-work poverty, are more likely to lower poverty rates in the medium term.

The first Millennium Development Goal established by the General Assembly was to reduce extreme poverty and hunger, including the reduction in social exclusion. In that regard, still 1,000 days are left to the 2015 target date for the MDGs. Now, the post-2015 UN development agenda, with the definition of the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals), should maintain the focus on human development.⁷ A number of developing countries in Asia have been narrowing the gap in living standards vis-à-vis developed countries. Others, especially in Africa, have fallen further behind. The number of the world's poor living on less than \$1.25 a day decreased from 1.9 billion in 1990 to 1.3 billion in 2008.⁸ There have been progress in poverty reduction, but major inequalities persist. International income inequalities can be measured by comparing the GDP per capita between countries and between individuals.

Poverty and inequalities in North America are persistent. While we can find countries with citizens living in poverty and social inclusion, there exist also countries where inequalities are not just economic problems that directly affect the most disadvantaged and excluded persons, but also issues relating to natural disasters, personal security, access to natural resources, discrimination, including discrimination against migrants, denial of human rights and social exclusion.

In Canada, 'L'Aquila Summit Commitment' helped to double investments in support of sustainable agricultural development.⁹ Other programs such as the 'Scaling Up Nutrition Movement' and the 'Muskoka Initiative' has helped to triple the investments in basic nutrition between 2006–2007 and 2011–2012.

Different studies have shown how the strength of the family is a core value that can reduce or increase family poverty. Child Trends, a NGO based in Washington, has shown how the family structure is a key factor that influence family poverty. Another study done by The Heritage Foundation, shows how stable marriage contributes to child poverty reduction. The Institute for American Values in partnership with the National Fatherhood Initiative and the Institute for Marriage and Public Policy, published a report, awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance, through which many politicians, academics and representatives of civil society can engage in the public discourse about the role of family and marriage in public policy and in reducing poverty. This study shows how a growing consensus of family scholars confirms that family matters in reducing poverty.

The Innocenti Research Centre, established in Italy in 1988 by the United Nations Children's Fund, has advocated for children worldwide with the 'Innocenti Report Card' publications. In its issue number 6, we found how United States and Mexico are at the bottom of the 'child poverty league', with child poverty rates of more than 20 per cent. It is also

⁷ 'Realizing the Future We Want for all', Report to the Secretary-General, New York, June 2012, page 9.

⁸ Shaohua Chen and Martin Ravallion, 'An update to the World Bank's estimates of consumption poverty in the developing world', Briefing Note (World Bank, Development Research Group, 2012).

⁹ Canada announced it at the G8 2009 L'Aquila Summit in July 2009.

an evidence how spending on family and social benefits is clearly associated with lower child poverty rates. United States is one of the few OECD countries to have an official definition of poverty and a long record of regularly publishing a wide range of poverty and inequality indicators, including information on children. In 1990, an all-party resolution committed the government of Canada to “seek to eliminate child poverty by the year 2000”.

In Mexico, ‘Oportunidades’ Program is the principal anti-poverty program of the Mexican government. This program helps poor families in rural and urban communities invest in human capital, improving education, health and nutrition of their children. The aim of this program is to improve the economic future of those families and therefore the poverty reduction in Mexico.

D. ENSURING WORK–FAMILY BALANCE

Balancing work and family life is a critical challenge in countries around the world continuously shaped by various economic, demographic and social factors. Jobs are becoming more complex with longer working hours. The needs of employees with family obligations are often ignored and families find it more and more difficult to balance their family responsibilities with the requirements of their jobs.

Comprehensive legal and policy frameworks balancing work and family life should be established to encourage shared responsibilities between family members, the State, the private sector and the society at large. Such policies may range from parental leave to child benefits and access to quality and affordable childcare. Flexibility of working hours and working place, professional support and advice and efforts to create a more family-friendly culture in the workplace are equally important.

As the labour market participation of women has increased, governments and employers in many parts of the world, have ‘stepped forward’ to find ways to support work–family balance at key family transition points such as childbirth, having young children, or caring for sick and elderly kin. Similarly enlightened employers have become aware of the benefits of a flexible and human response when employees have family crises such as illness, stress or bereavement. Many of the basic provisions reviewed, such as maternity, paternity and parental leave and early childhood education and care have emerged in richer nations, but not exclusively so. In other countries very little progress has been made on work–family balance or family–friendly initiatives with negative consequences for employee health and wellbeing, gender equality and child well-being.

There is now a critical mass of research evidence showing the benefits of work–family reconciliation measures. The negative impact of poor quality job conditions on individual workers and their families have been documented by research. Similarly, evidence indicating that long working hours put workers’ health and relationships at risk has emerged.

This especially affects vulnerable groups of employees, and those without kin help for the essential daily care of dependents and domestic responsibilities.

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The Pew Research Center, a think tank based in Washington, have researched how mothers and fathers spend their time and how the way they spend it has changed dramatically in the past half century in United States. Since 1965, mothers have almost tripled the amount of paid work they do each week, but they still lag fathers who work, on average, 37 hours a week. Meanwhile, fathers have increased their housework and child care time, but still only do about half of what mothers do.

In most two-parent households today, both parents work at least part time. Roughly equal shares of working moms and working dads say it is difficult to balance work and family responsibilities. Fully 40 per cent of working mothers and 34 per cent of working fathers say they “always feel rushed.” As we can see, work-family balance nowadays in North America is far from meeting what families desire and more efforts are needed. Since the start of the recession, the share of moms who prefer to work full time has increased significantly. Tough economic times may have ushered in a new mindset, as women in the most difficult financial circumstances are among the most likely to say working full time is the ideal situation for them.

United States appears to have low level of political commitment to the well-being of families, lacking even the guarantee of unpaid leave to all workers. The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) is the first and only federal parental leave legislation since 1993, although some states have implemented programs that make parental leave more accessible. This legislation offers twelve unpaid workweeks of leave and requires employers to provide job-protected unpaid leave for certain family and medical reasons, including pregnancy, childbirth, adoption etc... This legislation is limited to employees who have worked for at least twelve months at the same job. Other studies, such as the one from the Center on Children and Families at Brookings, shows how many moderately-educated Americans, especially high school-educated men, are left with jobs that provide markedly less stability and lower real wages than the jobs their parents enjoyed prior to the 1970s, causing less stability in families and even less commitment to have a family. For that, policy responses such as an increase in training for middle-skill jobs and an expansion of the child tax credit could help families in their struggle between work and family formation.

In Canada, such benefits as family allowances and maternity leave have long been directed to families. The situation of work–family balance is better than in the US, although some workplaces have long talked about creating better work–life balance for their employees. One–third of Canadians feel they have more work to do than time permits. That number rises to 40 per cent when family roles are taken into account¹⁰.

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In Mexico, nearly 29 per cent of employees work very long hours, one of the highest levels in the OECD where the average is 9 per cent. In Mexico, more public support to families with children is needed. Mexico has the highest child poverty rate in the OECD. Child–related leave entitlements are limited. Maternity leave, although paid at 100 per cent, lasts just 12 weeks and only covers women in formal employment. No other form of parental leave, including for fathers, is available. Efforts to increase childcare (Programa de Estancias Infantiles para Madres Trabajadoras) and pre–school enrolment rates (by implementing compulsory pre–school education) have translated into higher participation rates. But more can be done as childcare enrolment rates among under–3s remain considerably low (6 per cent compared with an OECD average of 31 per cent), and access to high quality and affordable care is central for facilitating parental employment.

Gender gaps in paid and unpaid work in Mexico are among the largest in the OECD area. Female employment rates, though modestly increasing, are the lowest in the OECD after Turkey (43 per cent of Mexican women are in paid work compared to an OECD average of 60 per cent). At home, Mexican women spend 4 hours per day more on unpaid work than men. Gender roles clearly constitute a barrier to women’s and Mexico’s economic opportunities.¹²

¹⁰ 2012 National Study on Balancing Work and Caregiving in Canada.

¹¹ OECD Better Life Index.

¹² OECD Better Life Index.

E. ADVANCING SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY

Intergenerational solidarity is critical for families and societies. Families are units where values are learned, culture is transmitted, and children learn relationship skills (Mitts, N. 2003). As such, they are the foundation of our global society. Intergenerational solidarity has been defined as bonding between and among individuals in multigenerational family networks and among different age cohorts in the larger community (Bengtson and Oyama, 2010). In recent times where the organization of our social and institutional structures has been increasingly along age-specific divisions which segregate one generation from another (e.g. schools are for the young, adults concentrate in work places, and seniors congregate in retirement communities), family is noted as probably the only 'truly age integrated' institution (Hagestad and Uhlenberg, 2005, 2006). While intergenerational relationships within the family are key, they are also fundamental to the well-being of the larger community and societies at large.

Policies and programmes promoting sound intergenerational relations and intergenerational solidarity play an important role in contributing to effective public policy by promoting social cohesion, national unity and shared responsibility (Hatton-Yeo, 2002). Intergenerational programmes also play a key role in supporting positive relations between generations. They provide a platform for developing positive relationships across age groups and have been shown to strengthen the quality of ties between family members (Thang, 2006).

Unfortunately the structure of many policies, programmes and services is often agebased. This age-graded approach is not always conducive to intergenerational harmony and generational integration. Such policy approaches are also reflected in the training of professional groups which is normally age segmented rather than life-course based, which creates further dislocation between the planning and delivery of services for people of different ages.

In a similar vein, family policy is often narrowly focused on families with children. With the advent of nuclear families, it also often narrowly restricts its scope to parents and children only. These policies seek to strengthen the family but in reality have weakened the extended family by excluding grandparents and other relatives. In an ageing society, governments and civil society are challenged to broaden the scope of policies to reflect longer life spans and changing roles and demands on each generation of a family.

The social integration of older people becomes more and more important especially nowadays as many retirees' income have become an essential economic source for their home and immediate families and relatives. Their social integration can be advanced through a variety of social benefits and volunteer programmes.

Social integration and intergenerational solidarity concerns not just grandparents–grandchildren relationships or older–young people relationships in the society, but also relationships between parents and their children. Investing today in good relationships between them, will benefit their social integration and intergenerational solidarity in the future.

Initiatives aimed at promoting intergenerational solidarity and cooperation encompass a variety of social protection schemes targeting the older and younger persons within families. At a community level, youth and older person's volunteer programmes are being implemented to bring generations closer together. Similarly, investing in cross-generational community centres has been found to increase the level of interactions between the generations. In the work-place, programmes promoting intergenerational communication through job-sharing and mentoring opportunities aim at improving both interactions between employees and their overall productivity.

The vision of moving toward a 'society for all ages', a concept formulated for the 1999 International Year of Older Persons and a critical component of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Aging (MIPAA), is one that has been embraced by many around the world. This is due in part to the major impact of the longevity revolution on individuals, families and communities as well as on the nature of age relations. The traditional family pyramid with more youth supporting elders is changing to an inverse pyramid that has two generations of older adults depending on fewer children. Economic, employment, urbanization and migration trends are threatening intergenerational ties and contributing to age-segregation in many societies. Individuals in both developed and developing countries are experiencing an eroding web of support that has deleterious consequences for all age groups. A recent report by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs underscores the importance of strengthening intergenerational solidarity through initiatives aimed at promoting "mutual, productive exchange between generations, focusing on older persons as a societal resource".

In an effort to take the concept of a society for all ages to a more local and concrete level, in 2002 the Temple University Center for Intergenerational Learning in Philadelphia developed Communities for All Ages (CFAA) –a holistic framework for community building that promotes the wellbeing of children, youth, and older adults, strengthens families, and fosters interaction and interdependence across ages. CFAA is both a vision and a life span approach to community building. It focuses on improving the quality of life for entire communities, not specific age groups, and transforming varied age groups from competitors to allies.

The American Association of Retired Persons in United States, dedicated to enhancing quality of life for old people, provides a wide range of unique benefits, special products and services for all its members. Their non-profit foundation 'AARP Foundation' tries to reduce poverty among vulnerable low-income American over 50 years old through empowerment programs for older people. In their study done in March 2012' through two

grandparenting studies, they showed how important are older people in their roles of: grandchildren carers, grandchildren communicators, shapers of next family generation, grandchildren counselors and consumer agents in goods and daycare services, etc...

Intergenerational Citizens Action Forum in Miami, Florida encourages high school-aged youth and older adult volunteers to come together to learn about public policy issues of mutual concern and, in a non-partisan effort, work to effect public policy change. Older adults serve as mentors to the students and help them to organize town meetings that address issues such as Social Security reform, crime and environmental protection. After the intergenerational teams define and prioritize critical issues to address, they receive training in how to conduct advocacy campaigns, and then initiate a community organizing campaign aimed at promoting desired community changes.

The establishment, in the United States, of Generations United, as the national agency supporting intergenerational initiatives, provided the opportunity to contact a spokesperson in Washington DC capable of promoting IPs (Intergenerational Programs) and lobbying for legislative support for the issue.

F. OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

The primary objective of the Meeting was to provide Member States and other stakeholders with expert opinion and recommendations regarding confronting family poverty and social exclusion; ensuring work-family balance and advancing social integration.

Experts dealing with various aspects of family policy were invited from a broad geographical distribution to participate in the meeting in their personal capacities. They were asked to provide a paper, participate in group discussions and give their expert opinion and policy recommendations on the best ways of integrating family perspective into overall policy making and developing family policies in the areas of poverty reduction, work-family balance and intergenerational solidarity in Europe. The experts are also expected to provide specific recommendations and examples of good practices in the three areas mentioned above.

Among the outcomes, papers by experts focused on the proposed issues, explained their relevance, provided quantitative and qualitative evidence, analyzed the roles of social institutions, summarized conclusions and provided policy recommendations. In as much as possible, an emphasis was placed on policy actions at the local, national, regional and international levels. This final report of the expert group meeting as well as expert papers has been used as an input for the 2014 Report of the Secretary-General on the preparations for and observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, submitted to the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session.

The report and experts' papers have been also posted on the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family website www.familyperspective.org.