



# General Assembly Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
26 November 2019

Original: English

**General Assembly  
Seventy-fifth session  
Social development: social development, including  
questions relating to the world social situation and  
to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family**

**Economic and Social Council  
2020 session  
25 July 2019–22 July 2020  
Agenda item 19 (b)  
Social and human rights questions:  
social development**

## **Implementation of the objectives of the International Year of the Family and its follow-up processes**

### **Report of the Secretary-General**

#### *Summary*

The present report, submitted in response to General Assembly resolution [73/144](#), is focused on recent family policy trends, mainly in the areas of gender-sensitive social protection, work-family balance, gender equality and family homelessness. Good practices in family policymaking by Governments, United Nations entities and civil society are also highlighted.



## I. Introduction

1. In its resolution [73/144](#), the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit a report at its seventy-fifth session, through the Commission for Social Development and the Economic and Social Council, on the implementation of the objectives of the International Year of the Family and its follow-up processes.

2. In the present report, a number of issues highlighted in the resolution are addressed, including social protection, work-family balance and gender equality. In view of the priority theme of the fifty-eighth session of the Commission for Social Development, “Affordable housing and social protection systems for all to address homelessness”, the report also includes a focus on family homelessness and affordable housing for families. Those topics are related to the topic of inclusive urbanization referred to in the resolution mentioned above.

3. The report contains information on initiatives relating to family policy development and implementation undertaken by Member States, as reported at the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly and at the fifty-seventh session of the Commission for Social Development. It also includes a description of relevant activities conducted by United Nations entities and by civil society organizations that cooperate on family issues with the Division for Inclusive Social Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.<sup>1</sup>

## II. Family trends

4. Families around the world are changing, many becoming smaller as the number of single-parent households grows. Currently, 65 per cent of all families are made up of either couples living with children of any age (38 per cent) or couples living with both children and extended family members, such as grandparents (27 per cent). Single-parent households constitute 8 per cent of the whole and are mostly composed of women with children (84 per cent). In sub-Saharan Africa and Central and Southern Asia, close to one third of all households include extended family members, but that proportion is shrinking, owing to rural-to-urban migration, among other factors.<sup>2</sup>

5. The diminishing number of extended families and the increasing number of single-parent families put into sharp focus the issue of social protection. Informal social protection has been traditionally offered within extended families through reciprocal or shared care arrangements. With changing family structures, such arrangements are often not viable; hence the growing importance of formal social protection systems and the need for gender-sensitive measures.<sup>3</sup>

6. As an increasing number of women take part in the formal and informal labour force, while continuing to assume a disproportionate burden of household work in comparison with men, work-family balance is more difficult to achieve. The imperative of ensuring gender equality in the family is therefore gaining more attention. Additional trends, such as rapid urbanization affecting families and the apparent rise in family homelessness, require further attention. The subsections below deal with those issues in more detail.

---

<sup>1</sup> In General Assembly resolution [73/144](#), Member States and other stakeholders were called upon to continue to provide information on their activities, including on good practices (para. 12). Only new initiatives taken by Member States since the previous report ([A/74/61-E/2019/4](#)) have been outlined herein.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), *Progress of the World's Women 2019–2020: Families in a Changing World* (New York, 2019).

<sup>3</sup> For analysis on more recent family trends and the key factors affecting them, see *ibid.*

## A. Gender-sensitive social protection

7. Despite a rapid decline in working poverty rates over the past decades, 8 per cent of employed workers and their families worldwide still live in extreme poverty, with only 45 per cent of the world's population effectively covered by at least one social protection cash benefit. Globally, only one third of children are covered by social protection: 92 per cent in Europe and North America, 56 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean, 14 per cent in East and South-East Asia and 13 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>4</sup>

8. Worldwide, one out of five children live in extreme poverty, 46 per cent of whom are under the age of 14. Such deprivation in childhood can lead to persistent and lifelong negative effects.<sup>5</sup>

9. Social protection coverage is linked to birth registration, which is an indispensable precondition for claiming individual rights, including basic social services. Globally, however, less than 73 per cent of children under 5 years of age have had their births registered, according to data from 161 countries over the period from 2010 to 2018. In sub-Saharan Africa, less than 46 per cent of children under 5 are registered.<sup>6</sup>

10. Worldwide, women are disproportionately excluded from social protection. Moreover, only 41 per cent of women who give birth receive maternity cash benefits. Separation, divorce and widowhood have more adverse economic consequences for women than for men. In families headed by single mothers with one income earner, close to 80 per cent of women are in paid work, but they still face a high risk of poverty and challenges in access to resources, the labour market and social services. Such families face larger deficits of time and wages than two-parent families, regardless of the number of income earners, owing to the absence of a second caregiver.

11. Single-mother families mostly lack the additional resources provided by a partner living in the same household and face negative consequences of gender pay gaps and the “motherhood pay gap”.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, mothers with custody of children are not adequately protected financially in most countries, owing to the low level of alimony payments from fathers.<sup>8</sup> Without partner support, work-family balance may become impossible to achieve. Furthermore, a lack of access to affordable housing, childcare services, child benefits and paid leave can lead to deep poverty traps.<sup>9</sup>

12. Social transfers are regarded as key to reducing poverty in single-parent households, and child- and family-related allowances have been gaining traction in all developing regions. Cash transfers are critical to promoting income security and

---

<sup>4</sup> *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2019* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.19.I.6). Data as at 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> “The motherhood pay gap measures the pay gap between mothers and non-mothers, the latter defined in most econometric studies as women without dependent children. It also measures the pay gap between mothers and fathers. This is different from the gender pay gap, which measures the pay gap between all women and all men in the workforce.” See Damian Grimshaw and Jill Rubery, *The Motherhood Pay Gap: A Review of the Issues, Theory and International Evidence*, Conditions of Work and Employment Series, No. 57 (Geneva, International Labour Office, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> The Nordic and Central European countries operate systems of “guaranteed maintenance”, where support is provided by the State when the non-custodial parent is unable or unwilling to pay child support. In that way, the State guarantees the right of the child to be adequately provided for, while attempting to ensure that fathers pay their share. See UN-Women, *Progress of the World's Women 2019–2020*.

<sup>9</sup> UN-Women, *Progress of the World's Women 2019–2020*.

investing in children's development and have resulted in improved nutrition, health and school attendance. Nevertheless, conditional, means-tested transfers often miss those most excluded. Moreover, there has been growing recognition that cash transfers should be backed by broader investments in health, education and childcare services, in addition to investments in accessible and affordable infrastructure, including housing and transportation. What's more, access to resources by women, including land and inheritance, is still limited in many countries, exacerbating the poverty risks affecting them and their families.<sup>10</sup>

## **B. Work-family balance, unpaid work and gender equality**

13. There has been visible progress in paid parental leave provision in the past two decades, including a slow but steady rise in the number of countries offering paternity leave. The provision of paternity leave and leave available to either parent rose from 21 per cent of countries in 1995 to 53 per cent in 2015. Maternity leave, which was offered in 89 per cent of countries in 1995, was available in 96 per cent by 2015, with 55 countries increasing the duration of paid maternity leave. Overall, 54 per cent of countries currently meet the International Labour Office minimum standard of 14 weeks, and 30 per cent provide its recommended duration of 18 weeks, with 27 per cent offering six months or more of paid maternity leave.<sup>11</sup>

14. The majority of member States of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) offer payments that replace over 50 per cent of previous earnings, with 13 OECD countries covering full earnings compensation across maternity leave. Parental and home-care leave benefits are usually lower than maternity leave; they replace between one third and two thirds of previous earnings, but the amounts vary across countries. For fathers, on average, eight weeks of paid leave is provided, either through paid paternity leave or paid father-specific parental or home-care leave.<sup>12</sup> Even in some of the world's highest-income countries, paternity leave is not as widely available as maternity leave and tends to be much shorter than maternity leave (usually 1 or 2 weeks).<sup>13</sup> Because it is so short, workers on paternity leave often continue to receive full wages.<sup>14</sup>

15. Despite some progress, parental leave policies still have limited reach in low-income countries. In sub-Saharan Africa, less than 16 per cent of all mothers with newborn infants, regardless of employment status, receive maternity benefits. This is true for women working in the informal economy, as subsistence farmers or domestic workers, in most developing countries.<sup>15</sup>

16. In terms of unpaid work, according to the latest data from around 90 countries, women spend, on average, about three times as much time as men do in unpaid care and domestic work, including taking care of children and older persons. The gender gap tends to widen when women have young children at home.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), "Paid parental leave and family-friendly policies: an evidence brief", July 2019.

<sup>12</sup> Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), "Parental leave systems", OECD Family Database. Available at [www.oecd.org/els/soc/PF2\\_1\\_Parental\\_leave\\_systems.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/els/soc/PF2_1_Parental_leave_systems.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Yekaterina Chzhen, Anna Gromada and Gwyther Rees, *Are the World's Richest Countries Family Friendly? Policy in the OECD and EU* (Florence, Italy, UNICEF, 2019). According to the report, Sweden, Norway and Iceland were the three most family-friendly countries for which complete data were available.

<sup>14</sup> OECD, "Parental leave systems".

<sup>15</sup> UN-Women, *Progress of the World's Women 2019–2020*.

<sup>16</sup> *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2019*.

17. Globally, gender inequality is still embedded at home, with only 57 per cent of women aged 15–49 who are married or in a domestic union able to make decisions about sexual relations and the use of contraceptives and reproductive health services.<sup>17</sup>

18. In a study of legal protections in 53 countries, 29 per cent of countries had legal gaps with regard to guaranteeing employment and economic benefits, with half of the countries studied having no laws to ensure equal pay for equal work. In addition, 24 per cent of the countries studied had legal gaps in terms of the protection of women in the context of marriage and family, with less than one third of the countries studied having laws stipulating 18 years as the minimum age of marriage for women and men, with no exceptions.<sup>18</sup>

### C. Family homelessness

19. Although research on family homelessness is scarce, some recent data indicate that it is on the rise. For instance, family homelessness has been consistently above 20 per cent of the total homeless population in some European countries.<sup>19</sup> Similar trends can be observed in the United States of America, where 33 per cent of the homeless population is made up of families with children, and in Canada, where 37 per cent of households have difficulties maintaining housing and even more are relying on emergency accommodation.<sup>20</sup>

20. In Europe, the lack of affordable housing, due in part to housing market changes, has been reported as contributing to growing homelessness. In addition, affordable housing shortages have been recently exacerbated by increased immigrant and refugee flows, with a high proportion of families in need of housing. In some European countries, migrants and ethnic minorities are overrepresented among homeless families.

21. Causes of family homelessness in developed countries are mostly linked to loss of employment, fractured family relations and people fleeing violence. The drivers of family homelessness in developing countries are more complex. As family support networks strain, the most vulnerable family members, such as children and older persons, are affected. Rising rates of divorce, separation and abandonment of women also result in growing female homelessness and an increasing number of female-headed households, which tend to be the poorest.<sup>21</sup>

22. In the global South, internal migration may drive homelessness, with households moving from rural to urban areas at greater risk of becoming homeless on a temporary or long-term basis. In addition, women and their children are made more vulnerable to homelessness as a result of the failure of many Governments to enforce women's human rights, including their rights to land and property. Importantly, Governments faced with rapid urbanization are not able to provide low-cost housing for low-income households in urban areas. Even where mass housing for low-income

---

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Jean Quinn, "The impact of personal and family circumstance on homelessness", paper presented at the expert group meeting on affordable housing and social protection systems for all to address homelessness, Nairobi, 22–24 May 2019.

<sup>20</sup> National Alliance to End Homelessness, State of Homelessness database, available at <https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/homelessness-statistics/state-of-homelessness-report/> (accessed on 27 August 2019); and Quinn, "The impact of personal and family circumstance on homelessness".

<sup>21</sup> Suzanne Speak, "The state of homelessness in developing countries", paper presented at the expert group meeting on affordable housing and social protection systems for all to address homelessness, Nairobi, 22–24 May 2019.

households is being built, it is rarely affordable for the poorest and rarely accompanied by affordable transportation.<sup>22</sup>

23. Data indicate that poverty rates among single adults with dependent children are considerably higher than national averages for all households, and well above the poverty rates for households with two or more adults, with or without dependent children.

24. There is a lack of data about the extent and experience of homeless families. Data on homeless populations not in contact with formal services are unreliable and incomplete. Some research in North America indicates that homeless single women with children exhaust informal resources, staying with relatives and friends for as long as possible before approaching formal homelessness services.<sup>23</sup>

25. Research on the impact of family homelessness on children is also limited. The few studies in existence reveal many factors detrimental to child development, including a lack of privacy, a lack of space to play or to bring home friends and socialize and a lack of quiet space to complete homework. Children may experience stress, anxiety and behavioural problems, as well as poor health and fatigue. Limited cooking facilities and space for food storage may lead to significant nutritional deficiencies. Evidence from Romania, for example, indicates that only 28 per cent of school-aged children living permanently in the streets were enrolled in education. More than half were also victims of violence.<sup>24</sup>

26. To prevent family homelessness, some Governments offer social protection and public housing to vulnerable families. Good practices in this area include the offer of direct financial assistance to all qualified renters in the Netherlands, a voucher system in the United States and the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana housing scheme in India, which provides affordable housing to the urban poor. Informed care services such as those provided by Sophia Housing in Ireland and the Centre for Non-Violence in Australia have proved to be successful in reducing family homelessness.<sup>25</sup> The “housing first” principle, namely, the provision of immediate housing options and supported rental housing to replace shelters and emergency accommodations, has also been successful at the local level, including in Finland, where a nationwide housing first policy has been credited with decreasing homelessness.<sup>26</sup> In South Africa, the Government addresses the problem of housing shortages, which often lead to homelessness, through a public works programme providing free housing to the homeless.<sup>27</sup>

27. Studies indicate that public and federal housing assistance for low-income households is highly successful at reducing family homelessness.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, although affordable housing is indispensable to ending family homelessness, it is not sufficient. Families need basic support in such areas as employment, childcare, education and transportation. Some research also indicates that services that can

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> European Observatory on Homelessness (EOH), *Family Homelessness in Europe: EOH Comparative Studies on Homelessness* (Brussels, 2017).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Quinn, “The impact of personal and family circumstance on homelessness”.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Emeka E. Obioha, “Addressing homelessness through public works programmes in South Africa”, paper presented at the expert group meeting on affordable housing and social protection systems for all to address homelessness, Nairobi, 22–24 May 2019.

<sup>28</sup> Coalition for the Homeless, “Proven solutions: housing-based solutions”. Available at [www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/ending-homelessness/proven-solutions](http://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/ending-homelessness/proven-solutions).

provide trauma-informed care lead to better outcomes for service users, especially women and children.<sup>29</sup>

### **III. Family policies, programmes and initiatives at the national, regional and international levels**

#### **A. General Assembly**

28. During a Third Committee debate held on 1 and 2 October 2019, Member States emphasized that, as key institutions for human capital development, families deserved greater protection and assistance in various forms, depending on their needs. Fostering stable families was mentioned as a priority for many countries, as was the promotion of the role of the family in social protection provisions for youth, older persons and people with disabilities, as that vital function made societies more inclusive.

29. Noting that family-oriented strategies could help to reduce poverty and provide social protection at the national level, Member States emphasized that one of the main objectives of the International Year of the Family was to strengthen national institutions to formulate and implement family-oriented policies aimed at responding to challenges faced by families. They also welcomed the initiatives taken at national level to fulfil that goal.

30. Investment in family-centred policies is considered an important tool for fighting poverty, inequality and social exclusion. Governments highlighted their efforts in supporting families in vulnerable situations and offered examples of good practices at the national level, such as conditional and unconditional cash transfers aimed at breaking the intergenerational transfer of poverty. In some countries, vulnerable families with young children, older persons and family members with disabilities receive additional assistance through social protection provisions. Conditional cash transfer programmes for poor households have been found to be especially effective in reducing poverty. In addition, housing assistance for low-income households in both rural and urban areas was identified as a good strategy to prevent poverty and homelessness.

31. Member States detailed several initiatives aimed at improving work-family balance for families with children. A new work-balance directive was adopted by the European Union to help parents better combine work with family responsibilities, through, inter alia, higher minimum standards for parental leaves. In addition, some European Union member States improved parental leave legislation; increased the duration of paternal leave and extended the flexibility of parental leave take-up. Maternity benefits have been expanded in several medium-income countries and improvements made in childcare provisions to increase the participation of women in the labour force.

32. Member States also recognized that the redistribution of domestic care helped parents to balance their work and family commitments. Some reported on the provision of incentives for private sector companies to encourage the employment of parents with young children. In some countries, mothers or fathers are entitled to three-year-long parental leaves and are guaranteed the possibility to return to their pre-leave employment. Such measures have been credited with an increase in labour force participation among women. In addition, some Member States reported new

---

<sup>29</sup> Quinn, "The impact of personal and family circumstance on homelessness".

programmes for young fathers, as well as the reintegration of adolescent mothers into the formal school system.

## **B. Commission for Social Development**

33. At the fifty-seventh session of the Commission for Social Development, held in New York from 11 to 21 February 2019, Member States noted that families and family-oriented policies contributed to the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, highlighting the cultural, social and economic importance of families and the role of family policies in enabling them to fulfil their numerous functions in society.

34. Several regional groups focused on the importance of ensuring work-family balance and reducing the gender pay gap and emphasized the positive impact that child and family benefits could have on family poverty reduction.

35. The Caribbean Community noted that a lack of decent work tended to negatively affect family stability. The prevalence of child marriage in some regions, including Western Africa, was highlighted, and recent measures to combat the practice emphasized. Ministers responsible for children's affairs in States members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) issued a political declaration and took a common position against child marriage during a meeting to adopt the ECOWAS Child Policy and its strategic action plan for the period 2019–2023. Awareness-raising activities to eliminate early marriage were mentioned by several African Governments. In addition, ECOWAS noted that the issue of birth registration continued to be a challenge in Africa, meriting more attention to ensure the social inclusion of all vulnerable children.

36. Governments detailed their efforts in providing cash and in-kind transfers, such as school supplies and meals, to help families with children of school age. Some mentioned their offer of universal contributory and non-contributory household grants and conditional and unconditional cash transfers to households in or at risk of poverty.

37. Member States reported on the importance of integrated services that combined social protection, health and education services for families. The Avancemos programme in Costa Rica helps to keep children from vulnerable families in school and offers support to teenage parents. Supporting low-income families to help them to care for older family members is a priority in the Dominican Republic. In El Salvador, a sustainable family strategy is pursued through a basic solidarity pension. France has increased the scope and scale of its family-oriented social protection systems, with single-parent family benefits increasing by 30 per cent since 2013.

38. Cash transfers benefit families in Ghana, and the country's school feeding programme covers 2.8 million children. Through the Livelihood Empowerment against Poverty programme, grants are offered to households in extremely vulnerable situations to help to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty. The Ghana National Household Registry helps to increase the efficiency of programme spending through better targeting of families that need assistance. Through the use of productive safety nets, grant beneficiaries may graduate to income-generating activities, so as to ensure their independence.

39. Honduras reported on its prioritization of supporting families in extreme poverty. Conditional monetary transfers, known as the Better Life Bonus, and in-kind benefits, such as food and school supplies, are offered to vulnerable households. Such policies and programmes have contributed to a 1.9 per cent decrease in extreme

poverty in the country. India reported on its reduction in the prices of medicine and health services for vulnerable families.

40. A newly established social protection initiative in Indonesia includes the Family Hope Programme, through which low income families are provided with access to free health insurance, 12 years of free basic education and assistance for people with disabilities and older persons. The programme has led to a 0.52 per cent reduction the poverty rate between 2016 and 2018.

41. Kuwait has developed social programmes for families in the context of the 2030 Agenda. New integrated policies have been implemented to promote family welfare, especially for those who are economically and socially marginalized.

42. Maternity and health insurance programmes are offered in Kenya, and households with vulnerable members, including persons with disabilities and older persons, receive financial support.

43. In Malawi, social cash transfers, family subsidies and decent and affordable housing programmes are offered to 60,000 beneficiaries, and a public works programme was created to target low-income families. Maldives provides allowances for single and foster parents. In Nicaragua, the root causes of poverty are tackled through capacity-building at the family and community levels.

44. Paraguay prioritizes female-headed households and offers housing subsidies for low-income families to slow down the intergenerational transfer of poverty. The Philippines provides conditional cash transfers for families.

45. Senegal offers a national family security grants programme. In the State of Palestine, cash transfers to poor families are in place and are funded by government and international aid; the prevention of family violence is also a priority. In Switzerland, providing assistance to vulnerable families with young children and equalizing the distribution of household responsibilities are priorities.

46. In 2018, Saint Kitts and Nevis launched the Poverty Alleviation Programme, through which cash transfers are granted to qualifying low-income families across the country. Likewise, the Mold, Empower, Nurture and Direct Families programme is a new strategy to lift vulnerable families out of poverty and reduce inequality.

47. Thailand provides support for families with newborn babies, low-income households and those at risk of poverty. In Ukraine, child grants are provided to 2.1 million families, which constitutes 38 per cent of all families with a child under the age of 18. A social cash transfer programme benefits 574,000 households in Zambia, and cash transfers are offered for child-headed households in Zimbabwe.

48. Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Djibouti, Egypt, Guinea, Myanmar, Pakistan and Romania, among other countries, also mentioned social protection provisions for vulnerable households. Some countries, including Hungary and Poland, provide assistance to families during the years their children are in school.

49. The European Union noted that balancing work and family life remained a challenge for many families in Europe. It was therefore important to find solutions that offered real choices for families and individuals on how they could shape their lives and careers while caring for children and older persons. Measures to ensure work-family balance were indispensable to households and children and positively affected women's participation in the labour force.

50. Reducing the gender pay gap is also a priority in the European Union, which recently issued a recommendation on pay transparency. As the gender pay gap also leads to gender gaps in pensions, more attention is needed to ensure the equitable distribution of care and other family responsibilities between men and women and to

encourage men to take up more care-related and household duties. A recent European Union initiative on work-life balance included stipulations for higher minimum standards for parental leaves, incentives for men to take up a greater share of household responsibilities and the reduction of disincentives for women to work.

51. Efforts to prevent domestic violence were highlighted, as well. In Morocco, new measures to protect women from domestic violence have been enacted and childhood policies are being integrated through the establishment of a national monitor for children's rights under the Ministry of Solidarity, Social Development, Equality and the Family. Improvements in family laws, including child protection, have been promoted in Kyrgyzstan.

52. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland emphasized that families constituted the basic units of society, providing the environment in which youth developed. Family relationships had a huge impact on the enjoyment of human rights by all family members. It was therefore critical that families received the necessary support to thrive, especially by ensuring that family policies and broader social protection systems were responsive to the changing needs of families and to dynamics in household and family composition.

53. In order to make sure that no one is left behind, it should be recognized that, in different systems, families take on different forms. Such recognition is vital to reducing inequalities and should be reflected in normative frameworks; more inclusive and responsive family policies are needed. In that context, the United Kingdom called for action on inclusive and responsive approaches to families to ensure that no family was left behind. Mexico also stressed the importance of recognizing the different forms of the family.

### C. United Nations system

54. In 2019, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) issued a policy brief drawing on the substantial evidence of the health, educational and economic benefits of family-friendly policies and recommending four transformative shifts in workplaces. The shift from maternity leave to parental leave is focused on offering time and support to all caregivers. The shift from an infrastructure-centred focus, which includes safer working conditions and breastfeeding rooms, to a people-centred focus, which provides a more comprehensive approach by investing in families to ensure that they have enough time and support to care for young children. The shift from individual responsibility to shared responsibility involved moving from viewing work-family balance as an individual matter to seeing it as a responsibility to be shared by Governments, private sector employers and families alike. Lastly, the shift from reducing parental stress to enhancing family well-being encourages a focus on family-friendly policies, reducing parenting stress and promoting well-being among parents, which would lead to better businesses, happier families and healthier children.<sup>30</sup>

55. The importance of fathers in families has been recognized by the United Nations global solidarity movement for gender equality, the HeForShe campaign, which emphasizes that committed, engaged fathers are good for families. Its champions advocate paid parental leave and impart their experiences of fatherhood to encourage parents to share the work and rewards of raising the next generation together.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> UNICEF, "Family-friendly policies: redesigning the workplace of the future", policy brief, July 2019.

<sup>31</sup> UN-Women, *HeForShe: 2019 Impact Report* (New York, 2019). See also [www.heforshe.org/en/movement](http://www.heforshe.org/en/movement).

56. In its report on women's progress for 2019–2020, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) focuses on families in a changing world, recognizing the importance of families to cultures and economies but warning that they are also places of violence and discrimination for women and girls. The pervasiveness of intimate partner violence is emphasized, as is the slow pace of the reform of family laws that still discriminate against women.<sup>32</sup>

57. In its report, UN-Women outlines a comprehensive family-friendly policy agenda to ensure equality and justice at home, focusing on violence prevention and response, family law reform, social protections and investment in public services, especially reproductive health care, education and care services. A set of recommendations is offered, focusing, inter alia, on supporting family care by providing time, money and services, guaranteeing women access to an adequate, independent income and implementing policies and regulations that support migrant families and women's rights. UN-Women also recommends investing in the collection of gender-sensitive statistics on families and households and ensuring that resources are in place for family-friendly policies.<sup>33</sup>

58. The Division for Inclusive Social Development has continued its activities to raise awareness of the importance of family-oriented policies and programmes for the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals, organizing several awareness-raising events and capacity-development projects in cooperation with Governments, United Nations entities and civil society.

59. The 2019 observance of the International Day of Families under the theme, "Families and climate action: focus on Sustainable Development Goal 13",<sup>34</sup> organized by the Division for Inclusive Social Development in cooperation with the Department of Global Communications, served to raise awareness about the role of families in helping to reach Goal 13 targets relating to improving education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity with regard to climate change mitigation, adaptation and impact reduction. Panellists highlighted intergenerational approaches to sustainability and sustainable development education and practice. Several United Nations initiatives were featured, such as the Greening the Blue and ActNow campaigns, and good practices for climate action from civil society were discussed.

60. In Kenya, the Division for Inclusive Social Development, in cooperation with the Centre for Research on Organizations, Work and Family and the Institute for Family Studies and Ethics of Strathmore University and the country's Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, organized a capacity-development workshop on aligning draft national policy on family promotion and protection with Sustainable Development Goals and defining an action plan, held in Nairobi, from 23 to 26 April 2019.

61. At the workshop, Ministry representatives noted that the new draft family policy provided the basis for accessing resources geared towards supporting families in Kenya. The Division for Inclusive Social Development emphasized that a successful family policy required both the integration of a family perspective and advocacy on family issues. The Division was committed to continuing to fulfil that function at the international and national levels.

62. The capacity-building workshop led to insights enabling the Government to align its policy with international standards and incorporate recommendations to

---

<sup>32</sup> UN-Women, *Progress of the World's Women 2019–2020*.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 234–240.

<sup>34</sup> See [www.un.org/development/desa/family/2019/02/28/idf-2](http://www.un.org/development/desa/family/2019/02/28/idf-2).

reflect the relevant Sustainable Development Goals in its final family policy.<sup>35</sup> At the conclusion of the workshop, a public event was organized to highlight the key outcomes and to provide a proposed plan of action to the technical working group and the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection.

63. The key recommendations stemming from the workshop included a call for improvements in reliable data-gathering in coordination with the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics; linking policy issues with data; incorporating the findings from the workshop to improve the draft family policy; ensuring the political commitment of government entities; and continuing consultations with key stakeholders in the Ministry towards the adoption of the final policy.

#### **D. Civil society**

64. Civil society organizations have remained very active in support of family-friendly initiatives at local, regional and international levels.

65. Under the European Union presidency of Finland, the COFACE Families Europe<sup>36</sup> network organized a conference entitled, “Shaping a healthy environment fit for children”, held in Helsinki, on 3 and 4 October 2019. The conference organizers took a holistic family perspective and multigenerational approach to considering the impacts of education, nutrition, early childhood education, environmental risks and family circumstance on the health and well-being of children. The expertise of the network was brought forward to strengthen the child health perspective in various policy areas.

66. The Doha International Family Institute, in cooperation with the Division for Inclusive Social Development and the International Federation for Family Development, organized an expert group meeting on the role of families and family policy in supporting youth transition, held in Doha, on 11 and 12 December 2018. The meeting was focused on youth inclusion, the intergenerational transmission of poverty, education, skills and labour market opportunities. Evidence was presented showing that family support, policies targeting youth transitions and incentives for youth skills-building strengthen societies’ capacity for social inclusion, poverty reduction, better job opportunities and gender equality. Notwithstanding such efforts, social protection services do not reach many young people in transition from education to work or those in vulnerable situations.

67. The European Large Families Confederation, which unites associations for large families across the continent, has continued its engagement with regard to promoting and supporting the well-being of families, rewarding best practices and backing local family policies. The European Network of Family-Friendly Municipalities<sup>37</sup> was established in 2018 by an agreement between the Confederation and the Province of Trento, Italy, to create a cultural, social and economic environment that is favourable, welcoming and attractive to families with children in Europe. The Network has been building family-friendly alliances with civil society, municipalities and private companies and working with strategic European institutions to promote a holistic approach to family policies. It has helped municipalities to introduce and maintain quality services and benefits for families, promote efforts to reconcile home and work

---

<sup>35</sup> Sustainable Development Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 11 and 16, and their relevant targets, were given prominence in the draft policy.

<sup>36</sup> Originally known as the Confederation of Family Organizations in the European Community, then the Confederation of Family Organizations in the European Union, the organization was renamed COFACE Families Europe in 2016.

<sup>37</sup> See [www.elfac.org/the-network](http://www.elfac.org/the-network).

life, encourage policies that help young people in transition to adulthood and promote the exchange of good practices in those areas.

68. The Family Institute of the Universidad de La Sabana in Colombia has been promoting research on family issues for the past 30 years, through three academic departments addressing the family and its contexts; the family and its internal dynamics; and affectivity and sexuality. It also offers family counselling and parent training programmes. The Institute held its ninth international congress, in Bogota, on 5 and 6 September 2019, addressing the topic of family challenges in the fourth industrial revolution.<sup>38</sup> The more than 600 participants attending the congress reflected on the tools needed to effectively respond to the challenges posed by new technologies. Five thematic panels were held with recognized experts in the educational, business, public and international spheres, including representatives of the Division for Inclusive Social Development, UNICEF and the International Federation for Family Development.

69. Generations United organized a global intergenerational conference entitled, “Bridging the Generations”, held in Portland, Oregon, United States, from 12 to 14 June 2019, which attracted close to 500 people from 12 countries, including representatives of the Division for Inclusive Social Development. The topics covered included building intergenerational solidarity in support of Sustainable Development Goals. Highlights from the conference included the release of the 2019 signature report entitled, “The best of both worlds: a closer look at creating spaces that connect young and old”, published in cooperation with the Eisner Foundation. The authors of the report encourage the development of indoor and outdoor spaces as safe meeting places for young people and older persons, in direct support of Sustainable Development Goal target 11.7 on providing access to safe, inclusive and accessible green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities. The interest and excitement generated by the conference points to the growing imperative of strengthening intergenerational solidarity around the globe.

70. The International Federation for Family Development, in partnership with UNICEF and in collaboration with the Division for Inclusive Social Development, presented a synthesis report on a global research project on the Sustainable Development Goals and families<sup>39</sup> at various awareness-raising events held throughout the year, in Bogota, Brasilia, Buenos Aires, Nairobi and Santiago, as well as in Curitiba and Sao Paulo, Brazil. The Federation also organized various side events during the fifty-seventh session of the Commission for Social Development, in partnership with the Division for Inclusive Social Development and the Permanent Missions of Hungary and Qatar, on the value of unpaid care and domestic work and strategies that contribute to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal target 5.4.<sup>40</sup> The Federation held its twentieth World Congress of Family Enrichment in London, on 19 and 20 October 2019, under the theme, “Family: the face of humanity”. Congress participants focused, inter alia, on issues relating to raising children, successful marriages, family well-being and family and technology. The Division also contributed through a presentation on civil society and parenting in the United Nations context at the event.

71. Make Mothers Matter, in partnership with the European Economic and Social Committee, organized a seminar in observance of the International Day of Families,

---

<sup>38</sup> See [www.unisabana.edu.co/nosotros/noticias-institucionales/detalle-noticias-institucionales/noticia/ix-congreso-internacional-sobre-la-familia/](http://www.unisabana.edu.co/nosotros/noticias-institucionales/detalle-noticias-institucionales/noticia/ix-congreso-internacional-sobre-la-familia/).

<sup>39</sup> Dominic Richardson, *Key Findings on Families, Family Policy and the Sustainable Development Goals: Synthesis Report* (Florence, Italy, UNICEF, 2018).

<sup>40</sup> See [www.familyperspective.org/act/act-0047-en.php](http://www.familyperspective.org/act/act-0047-en.php).

entitled “The role of families in achieving the circular economy”. Held in Brussels, on 14 May 2019, the event explored the ways in which families can be supported so they can contribute to the transition to a more circular economy. The seminar brought together policymakers who presented community-led initiatives combining a top-down and a bottom-up approach and highlighted the need to transform consumption patterns and reduce waste, by recycling and reusing objects and adopting eco-friendly habits, such as using energy-efficient products and buying locally, all of which can be encouraged at the family level. The event also served to demonstrate how Make Mothers Matter are engaging families in the circular economy through the Horizon 2020 research project, CIRC4life.

72. UNANIMA International<sup>41</sup> has recently undertaken a significant research project on family homelessness and trauma. Working with its partners, including Sophia Housing and New York University, the organization is collecting qualitative and quantitative data to be used to further advocate for people experiencing homelessness and displacement. That research and advocacy are aimed at promoting a paradigm shift where homelessness and displacement are seen, not as personal failures, but rather as structural failures and human rights violations. As advocates for individuals and families experiencing homelessness and displacement, UNANIMA International facilitates work with grassroots members and partners globally to bring the voices of the homeless to the international stage. The organization is a founding member of the Working Group to End Homelessness. With the participation of the Division for Inclusive Social Development, UNANIMA International organized a symposium, held in New York, on 17 October 2019, to discuss the global prevalence of family homelessness, its causes and actions to end it, with a focus on women and children, in particular girls, experiencing homelessness and/or displacement.

73. In 2019, the Walmart Centre for Family and Corporate Conciliation of the IAE Business School in Argentina published its fifth best practice guide, on the integration of work and family.<sup>42</sup> The publication shows the path taken by the IESE Family Responsible Employer Index Club, a network of pioneering companies around the world that have been promoting work-family balance in Argentina and throughout the region for the past decade. The guide contains strategies to help individuals to balance their family and work responsibilities; modalities for future work on the subject; contributions by the next generation of researchers; and a set of good practices and success stories provided by Argentine companies that have plans to instil the notion of corporate family responsibility in their organizational cultures. It contains contributions from more 25 international experts endorsing the work carried out in Argentina, as well as testimonies of executives and leaders committed to the issue.

74. The NGO Committee on the Family – New York advocates the inclusion of the family in United Nations resolutions and policies and works to ensure that Member States commit to the betterment of families through policy, legislation and programmes. The Committee organizes monthly meetings on various family-related topics to educate the public on international issues and policies affecting the family, promote the well-being of children, parents and extended family members and support the role of the community in strengthening the family. The Committee hosted a parallel event on the margins of the sixty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women, entitled “Gender empowerment starts at home”. The event featured presentations by two leading experts who have published extensively on the topic and who provided scientific evidence on how children perceive their own abilities, how

---

<sup>41</sup> The name UNANIMA combines the words “United Nations” with the Latin word “*anima*”, signifying spirit. See [www.unanima-international.org/who-we-are](http://www.unanima-international.org/who-we-are).

<sup>42</sup> *Hacia la Integración Familia y Trabajo: Guía de Buenas Prácticas* (Buenos Aires, 2019).

that perception influences their educational decisions and how parents can guide their children towards healthy development within an overall framework of gender equality.

75. The Vienna NGO Committee on the Family organized two international forums in 2019. One forum, held in cooperation with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, was focused on the global effort to end the AIDS epidemic by 2030, in the light of Sustainable Development Goal 3. The other, which was focused on child and youth media protection from the perspective of parents, was the third in a series of three forums dealing with families and digital media usage, organized in cooperation with the University of Salzburg. The Committee also published its online quarterly bulletin, “Families international”, incorporating forum proceedings, with a focus on endeavours to eliminate the practice of child marriage.

## IV. Conclusions

76. Families are active stakeholders in and beneficiaries of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The commitment by Governments to comprehensive family policy design and implementation demonstrates their appreciation of the role of families in development. Meeting the needs of families and empowering them to fulfil their numerous functions are key to the achievement of many Sustainable Development Goals.

77. As demonstrated in the present report, effective family-oriented policies and programmes are critical for poverty reduction, the promotion of gender equality, the advancement of work-family balance and the prevention of family homelessness.

78. Investments in family-oriented policies and programmes contribute to poverty reduction and investment in human capital. Families are also widely regarded as enablers of social protection; ensuring intergenerational solidarity and investing in families as the natural environment for children is therefore often seen as the best social protection strategy.

79. Support for the caregiving functions of the family through policies that foster work-family balance and through generous parental leaves has had a great impact on making sure that both men and women in the family have equal rights and responsibilities. When care is not fairly distributed and supported, unequal relations within the family persist, as care deficits are usually filled by women.<sup>43</sup> Shared care within a household creates a family life where both parents are involved in raising a child and a better environment for shared decision-making that benefits the family.

80. There is a growing realization that improving work-family balance for women and men helps in achieving gender equality. Positive developments in that area include expanded parental leave regulations, providing longer maternity leaves and investing more in childcare provisions. Nevertheless, more needs to be done, especially in low-income countries.

81. Mostly linked to poverty and loss of employment, family homelessness is a worrying phenomenon. Single mothers are at much higher risk of homelessness than couples with children. The most significant causes of family homelessness are economic hardship, relationship breakdown and domestic violence.

82. Family homelessness appears to be on the rise and deserves more attention, as it is a distressing experience affecting the health and well-being of individuals and

---

<sup>43</sup> Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona, *A Contemporary View of “Family” in International Human Rights Law and Implications for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*, UN-Women Discussion Paper, No. 21 (2017).

families, especially women and children. If chronic, it may lead to trauma and, if not addressed, can have potentially devastating and lifelong implications for development.<sup>44</sup>

83. As family homelessness is mostly not characterized by addiction or severe mental illness or disability, families do not have a complex support system of health interventions on which to rely. Effective strategies to avoiding family homelessness therefore include prevention measures and the availability of adequate family housing from the start. Rapid rehousing and the integration of domestic violence services into overall services are also key. Sound social protection policies for households with children, especially those headed by women, also have the potential to prevent family homelessness.

## V. Recommendations

84. **Member States are encouraged to consider the following recommendations:**

(a) **Continue their efforts towards the implementation of the objectives of the International Year of the Family and its follow-up processes as conducive to the realization of the 2030 Agenda;**

(b) **Invest in family-oriented policies targeting poverty to prevent the intergenerational transfer of poverty;**

(c) **Invest in social protection policies and programmes, promote gender-sensitive social protection measures and recognize the role of families as social protection providers;**

(d) **Invest in a variety of work-family balance policies focused, inter alia, on expanding childcare services and parental leaves, including paternity leaves;**

(e) **Ensure that family-oriented strategies promote gender equality and the equal sharing of household responsibilities between men and women and recognize the burden of unpaid work;**

(f) **Enhance efforts to ensure equal pay for equal work;**

(g) **Safeguard legal identity and birth registration for all newborns to ensure their full participation in society and access to benefits, including social protection;**

(h) **Promote investments in accessible and affordable infrastructure, including housing and transportation, to benefit families and prevent family homelessness;**

(i) **Address the causes of family homelessness, including poverty, domestic violence and the lack of affordable housing, and expand efforts to provide adequate and affordable housing with support services for families.**

---

<sup>44</sup> Quinn, "The impact of personal and family circumstance on homelessness".