



INTERNATIONAL
DAY OF FAMILIES
15 MAY 2017

DPI/NGO BRIEFING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH DSPD/DESA
18 May, 11 AM - 12:30 PM
United Nations Headquarters, New York
Conference room (TBC)

Families, education and well-being

Background Note

Families and family-oriented policies and programmes are vital for the achievement of many goals and targets of the Sustainable Development Agenda. In particular, families have a unique role in supporting the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

In the 2030 Agenda, Member States commit to “strive to provide children and youth with a nurturing environment for the full realization of their rights and capabilities, helping our countries to reap the demographic dividend, including through safe schools and cohesive communities and families.” (A/RES/70/1, para. 25)

Indeed, cohesive, stable, supportive and well-functioning families are primary educators for young children and are truly

indispensable to their emotional well-being impacting their educational achievement.

Primary caregivers educate and socialize children and youth and ensure their well-being. Parents, and often grandparents, have a vital role in safeguarding good quality education starting with early childhood and extending throughout their children's and grandchildren's lifespan.

Early childhood spans the period up to 8 years of age. It is essential for physical, social, cognitive and emotional development of children. **Early childhood education** (target 4.2) is essential to prepare children for primary education. Beyond that, research indicates that early childhood learning lasts a lifetime and brings about many benefits.

In particular, early stimulation and interaction with parents and caregivers 'jumpstart the journey of brain development and a lifetime of learning'. The first years of life are crucial for children, how they are parented and cared for affects their brain function for the years to come. Investments in early childhood care, education and development also help to reduce gaps putting children from lower socio-economic backgrounds at a disadvantage. In fact, the returns of such investments are highest among poorer children and serve as a stepping stone out of poverty and exclusion.

As the components of early childhood development include education, health and nutrition, protection and stimulation, safe, nurturing, responsive and stimulating family environments are crucial for children. In fact, girls and boys with involved and supportive parents tend to have high attendance records, positive attitudes towards school work, achieve better grades and have higher career aspirations.

It is then vital for parents to support their children on their lifelong educational journey. That is why programmes supporting **parental education** and developing parental skills have an often untapped potential to contribute to the achievement of SDG4, especially for child and youth school success and lifelong learning.

Parental involvement improves educational outcomes for children and has been linked to better test scores, fewer emotional and behavioural problems, lower dropout rates and better transition into adulthood. Facilitating parenting involvement has an often untapped potential to the achievement of SDG4.

Similarly, the educational role of grandparents in families should not be overlooked. The number of so called skipped-generations households where grandparents are primary caregivers for their grandchildren is on the rise mainly due to external migration of parents. Thus, grandparents take on a role of a caregiver and an early educator for children and youth in their families.

Working conditions of parents affect their ability to play an active role in their children's education. In fact, in order to be good educators in families, parents need family-friendly policies ensuring **work-family balance** so that they can be productive employers and involved parents. Policies encouraging corporate responsibility and family-friendly work environments are essential here and have already been proved to improve workers productivity and dependability.

The private sector plays a role in supporting training and education of young people, be it through internships or on-the job training. Some enterprises also support intergenerational exchanges where both youth and older adults are mentors or mentees, learning new skills in intergenerational settings.

In light of the above, this year's observance of the International Day of Families focuses on the role of families and family-oriented policies in promoting education and overall well-being of their members. In particular, the Day is to raise awareness of the role of families in promoting early childhood education and lifelong learning opportunities for children and youth. The Day will also highlight the importance of all caregivers in families, be it parents, grandparents or

siblings. The observance will also highlight the importance of parental education for the welfare of children and will focus on good practices for work-family balance to assist parents in their educational and caregiving roles. Good practices from the private sector in support of working parents, as well as youth and older persons in the workplace will also be highlighted.

The Day also aims to discuss the importance of 'knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others, through **education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles**, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development' (SDG4, target 4.7)



References:

"Building Better Brains: New Frontiers in Early Childhood Development", UNICEF, 2014

"Progress for Children: Beyond averages, learning from the MDGs", UNICEF, 2015 (number 11)

"Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", United Nations, 2015 (A/RES/70/1)

Report of the Expert Group Meeting on Family policies and the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, New York, 12-13 May, 2016.

Report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of the objectives of the International Year of the Family and its follow-up processes, United Nations, 19 November 2015 (A/71/61-E/2016/7)