



UNITED NATIONS      NATIONS UNIES  
Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)  
Division for Social Policy and Development

**Aide Mémoire**

United Nations Expert Group Meeting,  
New York  
1 – 3 June 2011

**“Assessing family policies:  
Confronting family poverty and social exclusion  
&  
Ensuring work-family balance**

Convened as part of the preparations for the  
twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, 2014

**I. BACKGROUND**

*Family policy in the UN context*

The United Nations Programme on the Family in the Division for Social Policy and Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) is organizing an Expert Group Meeting on assessing family policies, to be held 1-3 June 2011 in New York. The theme of the meeting is “Assessing family policies: confronting family poverty and social exclusion & ensuring work-family balance.” The meeting is convened as part of preparations 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 policymaking. 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 General Assembly resolution adopted in 2010 (A/RES/64/133) 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.

The recent resolution of the Commission for Social Development (E/CN.5/2011/L.6/Rev.1, to be adopted by the Economic and Social Council in July 2011) on the “Preparations for an observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family” 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.

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

### ***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 aspect of child well-being; attempt to reconcile work and family life, as well as support intergenerational strengths and various care arrangements within the family.

### ***Assessing family policies***

The assessment of family policies at national and regional levels is necessary in order to improve on 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.

### ***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-focused social transfer programmes in developing countries provide cash transfers as well as offer basic services to their recipients. Conditional and unconditional cash transfers target families living in poverty but differ in scope and context. Initially introduced in Latin America, they are increasingly being implemented in Africa and Asia. The level of the benefit varies from 20 per cent of mean household consumption in Mexico to 4 per cent in Honduras and lower amounts for similar programmes in Bangladesh, Cambodia and Pakistan.

The effective delivery of social transfer programmes depends on efficient administrative structure and adequate financial capacity. Their success also depends on the adequate provision of basic social services, especially to those most vulnerable.

### ***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.

With the increasing labour participation of women both women and men are engaged in gainful employment. Still, the domestic workload remains mostly the responsibility of women and their contribution to the well-being of their families and societies remains unrecognized, at least in monetary terms.

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.

## **II. OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES**

The primary objective of the Meeting is to provide Member States and other stakeholders with expert opinion and recommendations regarding assessing family policies, confronting family poverty and social exclusion and ensuring work-family balance.

Experts dealing with various aspects of family policy are invited from a broad geographical distribution to participate in the meeting in their personal capacities. Experts will be 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; developing family policy as a subfield of social policy and creating frameworks for assessing family policies. The experts are also expected to provide specific recommendations on anti-poverty policies focusing on families as well as policies ensuring work-family balance.

The expected outcomes of the Meeting are:

- a) 7-10 page paper (single-spaced) prepared by each expert on issues in the annotated agenda and including policy recommendations
- b) final outcome report encompassing a summary of discussion, policy recommendations and possibly papers by the experts

Papers by experts will focus on issues identified in the agenda below, explain their relevance, provide quantitative and qualitative evidence, analyze the roles of social institutions, summarize conclusions and provide policy recommendations. In as much as possible, an emphasis will be placed on policy actions at the local, national, regional and international levels. The report and experts' papers will be posted on the website of the Programme on the Family.

The final report of the expert group meeting as well as expert papers will be used as an input to the 2011 Report of the Secretary-General on the preparations for and

observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family (IYF). This report will be submitted to the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session through the Commission for Social Development and the Economic and Social Council.

### **III. ORGANIZATIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS**

The meeting will be convened at United Nations Headquarters in New York, 2 United Nations Plaza, conference room DC2-1949 (conference room DC2-1337 will serve as a back up room).

The total number of participants will be approximately 25, including 12 experts participating in their personal capacity. These experts will be identified and invited by the Division for Social Policy and Development. Representatives from international organizations, United Nations offices and agencies as well as civil society organizations will also be invited. Participants are expected to arrive on 31 May and stay through the duration of the meeting, through the end of the day on 3 June.

Only introductory remarks and brief presentations are envisioned. The preparatory process, including advance preparation of written inputs by the experts is seen as very important. The participants should submit their papers to the UN Secretariat by 16 May 2011. The list of issues to explore is given below, it should be read in conjunction with the annotated agenda provided to all participants, where experts are identified as moderators and providers of introductory remarks.

The participants will meet in 11 working sessions

- Each session will have brief introductory remarks or presentation/s by expert/s which will introduce the topic and provide context for ensuing discussion
- A moderator for each session will lead the group discussion and will be responsible for compiling the recommendations from each session
- Discussions and brainstorming will be the preferred method of work and no formal conference style presentations are envisioned
- The working language of the meeting will be English. There will be no interpretation provided. All submissions should be made available to the Secretariat in English.

### **IV. PROPOSED AGENDA**

#### **Wednesday, 1 June 2011**

Welcome and introduction  
Objectives and expected outcomes

### **Session I: Current trends affecting families: a need for policy response**

The significance of globalization for families  
Economic and social trends affecting families  
Demographic trends affecting families  
Changing roles of women, men and children  
Gender equality issues

### **Session II: Integrating family perspective into overall policy making & family policy as a subfield of social policy**

What are implicit and explicit family policies?  
What qualities does a family impact lens bring to policymaking?  
Why should family policy be a subfield of social policy?  
What examples exist of family policies around the world?  
How has research influenced policy decisions?

### **Session III: Towards an assessment of family policies**

General perspectives on family policy  
Intended purposes and outcomes of family policies  
Existing frameworks for assessing family policies  
Assessing family policies in the OECD countries  
Assessing family policies at national and regional levels  
Data sources and indicators

**Thursday, 2 June 2011**

### **Session IV: Family policies around the world: what do they focus on? Are family poverty and work-family balance at the center of attention of policymakers?**

Major focus of family policies around the world  
Family policies and low fertility  
Family policies and ageing societies  
To what extent do policies focus on family poverty?  
Policy-makers and work-family balance  
Specific types of anti-poverty and anti-social exclusion measures focusing on families (e.g. cash transfers, child benefits, tax deductions)  
What types of families are a focus of such policies (e.g. single-parent headed, large families, immigrant families)  
Assessing anti-poverty strategies focusing on families  
Challenges to effective anti-poverty policies with families at their centre

**Session V: Confronting family poverty and social exclusion: anti-poverty policies focusing on families – do they work?**

Poverty as a form of social exclusion  
Gender equality  
Gender roles revisited  
Male unemployment and the crisis of masculinity  
Reproductive and health issues  
Single-parent households, marriage dissolution and poverty

**Session VI: Anti-poverty policies focusing on families: regional overview – Western and Eastern Europe and North America.**

Families in poverty and at risk of poverty  
Child poverty and child benefits  
Poverty among older persons  
Focus on care arrangements  
Provision of social services  
Increasing women's labour participation  
Combating social exclusion

**Session VII: Anti-poverty policies focusing on families: regional overview: Africa, Latin America & Asia.**

Conditional and unconditional cash transfers in Latin America and Africa  
Prevention of inter-generational transmission of poverty  
Education of children  
Combating child labour  
Provision of basic services  
Focus on reproductive health and maternal mortality  
Fighting HIV/AIDS  
Migration patterns and their effect on families

**Friday, 3 June 2011**

**Session VIII: Work-family balance: the importance of family focused solutions**

Work family conflict  
Work place and working parents  
What are the elements of an effective work-family balance policy?  
Private sector and work-family balance solutions  
Investing in parenting  
Child care provision (family, employer, Government, private)  
Work-life policies that are best for children  
Unpaid work

Assessing work-family policies  
Impediments to effective work-family policies

### **Session IX: Work-family balance: overview of policies in developed countries**

Parental leave policies  
Parental leave and gender equality  
Focus on fathers  
Caring for children and young adults  
Caring for older persons  
Caring for persons with disabilities  
Access to childcare

### **Session X: Work-family balance: overview of policies in developing countries**

Changes in the extended family structures and policy response  
Parental leave provisions  
Migration and policy response  
Gender equality  
AIDS epidemic, care arrangements and policy response

### **Session XI: Distillation of findings, finalization and adoption of recommendations**

## **V. OTHER ARRANGEMENTS**

### **Passports, visas and travel arrangements**

Participants will be expected to make necessary arrangements to have up-to-date passports. An official invitation letter should be used to obtain visa. An information note will be sent out to participants to assist with travel arrangement to New York.

The United Nations assumes that experts invited to participate in meetings are in good health, and that they will inform the Organization of illness or disability that could prevent travel to or participation in the meeting.

All relevant correspondence should be addressed to **Ms. Renata Kaczmarska** ([kaczmarska@un.org](mailto:kaczmarska@un.org)), telephone: (212) 963-4596 with copy to Ms. Dolores Vicente ([vicented@un.org](mailto:vicented@un.org)), telephone: (212) 963-2820; fax (212) 963-0111; mailing address: Ms. Renata Kaczmarska, United Nations Programme on the Family, Room DC2-1360, 2 United Nations Plaza, New York, New York, 10017.



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