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**“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

Introduction

The Expert Group Meeting on “Assessing family policies: Confronting family poverty and social exclusion and ensuring work-family balance” took place in New York, from 1-3 June, 2011. It was convened as part of preparations for the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, 2014.

The Expert Group Meeting was organized in response to the General Assembly and Economic and Social Council’s resolutions on the family. The most recent ECOSOC resolution (2011/29) noted the importance of designing, implementing and monitoring family-oriented policies, especially in the areas of poverty eradication, full employment and decent work and work-family balance. The resolution also encouraged Member States to continue their efforts to develop appropriate policies to address family poverty, social exclusion and work-family balance. The meeting aimed at reviewing policies in those areas and offering recommendations to Member States and other stakeholders. Experts from all major geographical regions of the world also discussed current trends affecting families; the importance of integrating family perspective into overall policy making and efforts towards the assessment of family policies.

Current trends affecting families & the need for policy response

Experts acknowledged the lack of a formal consensus on the definition of family, stressing at the same time that some form of family or kinship relationship characterize all societies. Primary family functions of reproduction, socializing the next generation, early education and stabilizing adult personalities are common to all societies. Although, the definitions of family and family policies vary, it is important to assess the impact of socio-economic policies from a family-focused perspective.

Globalization with its increasingly independent global economy as well as advances in communication and information technologies has greatly impacted nation-states' and families' abilities to control their economic and social well-being. To a large extent nation states have been losing their role of a supplier of social safety nets with detrimental effects on families worldwide. Informalization of work has contributed to low-cost production for global markets but informal employment does not offer social security benefits, such as health insurance or maternity leave, leaving many families more vulnerable.

Undeniably, family life is not insulated from a wider social sphere and globalization impacts many of its aspects directly and indirectly. The overly economic focus of policies being implemented worldwide often lead to the marginalization of social and cultural responses to challenges faced by families and result in lifelong disadvantages. In the face of extensive economic, political, socio-demographic and technological transformation affecting societies, it is then important to consider the impact of policies and programmes bearing on family poverty and work-family balance and the capacity of families to successfully fulfill their numerous roles.

Family diversity is growing around the world and the traditional breadwinner/homemaker family is no longer normative. Economic role of women is rising as they enter paid labour in growing numbers and dual-earner households are becoming more common in most regions.

The highest number of women in paid labour force is in East Asia (69 per cent), followed by Sub Saharan Africa (62 per cent), U.S. (59 per cent), Europe (53 per cent), Caribbean (48 per cent) and South Asia (36 per cent). Rise in female employment generally contributes to the improvement in their social status and decision-making but it may not always be the case as women still are forced to accept lower wages and unstable work conditions in order to support their families. Notably, among poor and non-Western societies, working outside of the home for women, is mostly a strategy for collective survival and not a path to individual advancement. Moreover, women world-wide are still predominantly in charge of household responsibilities, despite some increases in men's participation mostly observed in Western countries.

Gender roles and relationships are steadily changing with rising number of new living arrangements, including cohabitation, rising divorce rates and a number of out-of-wedlock births. The feminization of labour markets often conflicts with traditional values

and concepts of women's roles in societies sometimes leading to violent responses. Moreover, in many regions, girls and young women continue to have limited access to educational, economic and social opportunities and gender discrimination in families and societies at large prevails.

Families are getting smaller. Fertility rates are falling throughout the worlds, except for Sub-Saharan Africa, as a consequence of increasing number of women in the labour force finding it difficult to combine work and family responsibilities; later age of marriage; postponing of childbearing and wider use of contraceptives. The world is rapidly ageing with a number of older persons projected to exceed the number of children by 2050.

Although actual migration numbers are low (3 per cent or 191 million individuals), migration has a major economic and social impact on families whose members decide to migrate. Migration is mostly a family decision with an increasing number of women migrating, accounting for nearly 50 per cent of all migrants. So called "transnational mothering" is a growing phenomenon, where mothers migrate to better provide for their families, commonly accepting lower-paying menial jobs and facing the risk of exploitation. Often, they are able to remain in close contact with their children and other family members, thanks to communication technology advances. At the same time, physical contacts are limited as Governments often tighten family reunification policies, forcing family members to stay apart.

The effects of economic restructuring forced by globalization are impacting the most vulnerable, especially children. Reduction in nutritional, health and early care programmes for their families often results in lifelong disadvantages with long term ramifications. Support for families with children is necessary to reverse this trend. From a research point of view, children are increasingly studied separately, as a distinct group despite the fact that they rely on their families and the social capital provided by them to ensure their proper development.

Due to prevailing economic trends including the reduced ability to control monetary flows, Governments had to adjust their welfare and family support systems. As a consequence, families are compelled to rely on themselves when their resources and options are diminishing. What's more, Governments often do not take into account the effects of trends noted above on families. As the mainstream focus is on economic effects and challenges of globalization, its social impacts on families and communities are mostly neglected. With increasing challenges to families' capability to fulfill their numerous roles, there is a growing need to counteract their negative impacts and assist families in material and non-material care for their family members.

Integrating family perspective into overall policy making

Experts agreed that there is an underlying premise that families are basic units of society and as such they should be protected and nurtured. Yet families are not systematically placed at the centre of research, policy and practice. Even when family

rhetoric is abundant in political deliberations, it rarely translates into specific family-oriented policies which take into account family functions and needs. Instead, policies mostly focus on individuals without acknowledging the families in which they are embedded and family considerations are rarely incorporated fully into the course of policy and programme design, implementation and evaluation.

Family policy as a term is not widely recognized or commonly used by policymakers, media or the public. Also, few formal entities are entrusted with the analysis of policies and programmes and their effects on families. Although the knowledge about families through research and practice has grown, this knowledge is rarely translated into policy, due in part to the prevailing individualistic perspective. Moreover, there is little dedicated leadership and meager resources for assessing family impacts.

Although there is a universal recognition of the importance of the family, there is a wide variation among countries in terms of developing explicit family policy frameworks, their implementation and evaluation. An overview of policies in Western countries, especially the U.S. revealed that family policies often reflect and promote individualism and self-sufficiency and often relegate family issues to the 'personal' or 'private' realm.

Given the difficulty of defining the family, it was noted that family policies could be constructed according to either structural or functional definitions of a family. Structural definitions specify membership according to whether family members are related by blood, marriage, or adoption. Functional definitions define membership according to who is committed to fulfilling core family functions such as taking care of each other. Family policies usually explicitly address the five main family functions of (1) family formation; (2) committed, stable partner relationships; (3) economic support; (4) childrearing and (5) caregiving (including long-term care).

The family impact lens in policymaking acknowledges the critical implicit roles that family considerations play in policymaking when families are established as a criterion for analyzing the consequences of any policy or programme, and when families are used as a means to accomplish other policy ends. Such family impact approach can enrich the policy debate: it shifts attention beyond the individual; embodies commitment to others and moves towards a holistic, multidimensional way of thinking and a lifespan perspective.

Policy makers have an increased responsibility to communicate family issues not as private problems but as public priorities. A practical approach is to focus on the economic and social contributions of families to societies at large to illustrate the importance of family policies. Families generate productive workers; rear caring and committed citizens; make efficient investments to reach societal goals and use effective means to promote positive child and youth development. Economic and social contributions of families in these areas are very substantive and, as research has demonstrated, family-centred policies in support of these contributions are cost-effective.

For instance, there is persuasive evidence that the quality of care by age 3 and a half predicts later dropout rates at school. Hence, above and beyond children's well-being, there is an economic argument for proper childcare as it results in economic benefits and increased efficiency later in life. Importantly, children with secure attachments are more self-confident, better problem-solvers and later more productive workers. Moreover, research demonstrates that prevention programmes aimed at preventing substance abuse and violence were more effective when focusing on families rather than youth-only; some family-focused programmes were found to be as much as nine times more effective.

There is no simple, linear association between science and policy, particularly for family policies that often touch on conflicting values regarding equality, personal responsibility and other issues. Family professionals, however, should communicate the value of family policies to policy makers, e.g. through meetings with policymakers. For instance, Family Impact Seminars, consisting of presentations, discussions and briefing reports for policymakers in 27 states of the U.S. aim to connect research and policy by promoting respect for and the use of evidence in policy decisions and encouraging policymakers to examine issue through the family impact lens. Seminar evaluation indicates that following the seminars, policymakers reported being 'quite a bit' more likely to consider how pending legislation might affect families (73 per cent) and to consider how new legislation under development might affect families (60 per cent).

In a discussion on the importance of applying a family impact lens in policymaking, experts underlined that in an increasingly competitive world, every nation depends on human development and those family decisions and actions impact that development. Communicating the value of families seems simple but it is quite difficult but worth doing, so that family policy has a potential to turn the rhetoric into reality.

Family policymaking should be evidence-based and relevant research findings should be given to politicians, policymakers and people at large. Economic arguments for supporting family policy are very important and indeed families are economic engines of societies. However, family functions go beyond economics. Families provide an emotional component essential for human bonding and instilling values. As economic problems are fed by emotional deficits, policy should take the interaction between the two into account. It is then important to integrate all aspects of family support systems to develop comprehensive family policies.

Several experts noted that evidence-based family policy making assumes the existence of democratic societies, where such policies could be implemented through discussion and debate. It is difficult, however, to persuade policy makers about the value of family policies in the absence of negotiating structures. Moreover, in most developing countries and many developed countries, there are no family-focused institutions to deal with family policy and research on policy impact on families is limited or does not exist.

Moreover, family policies sometimes support Governments' established positions without consultation with families or using evidence from research. For instance, policies supporting gender equality may make it difficult for families to make decisions regarding childcare and other issues (e.g. semi-compulsory day care age for young children in some countries). On the other hand, sometimes, family issues are regarded as private area and no specific policies for families are established for fear of excessive interference in the private domain.

Experts also pointed out the limitations of a family approach, warning that family policy can be myopic if it fails to keep pace with changing forms, functions and diversity of contemporary family life. Also, we cannot argue that family factors will affect every issue or that family approaches are always most effective.

Towards an assessment of family policies

There have been limited attempts to assess the effectiveness of family policies. Some efforts have been made in Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, especially within the European Union membership. The interest in such assessment relates to several developments affecting family lives: growing labour participation of women affecting work family balance; child development and child well-being outcomes and population ageing. Efforts are then made to evaluate the role of family policy vis a vis these developments.

Family policy assessments usually focus on families with young children and adolescents with several approaches to family policy assessment:

- (1) family is regarded as the main unit of analysis
- (2) child-centered approach focusing on the well-being of children
- (3) mother and/or fathered centered perspective focusing on work-family balance

The scope of family policy is often not well defined but several fields of policy measures can be distinguished:

- (1) parental leave policies
- (2) early childhood education and care
- (3) family benefits
- (4) work related policies

Interventions can be in-cash (such as child benefits), in-kind (such as childcare services) and in-time (e.g. parental leave). Several perspectives on family policy can be distinguished, such as expenditure, social rights and outcome perspective.

Expenditure perspective uses data on public expenditure on social services to assess welfare effort. Such data is available for a large number of countries and allows for cross-country comparisons. On the other hand, internationally comparable expenditure data contain information about expenditure on broad categories of programmes rather

than on individual measures. The differential outcomes of different provisions of leave policies, benefits, or services vary from country to country and cannot be evaluated based on broad expenditure categories.

The **social rights perspective** attempts to provide information about benefit entitlements or guaranteed access to services. Such assessments of family policies use indicators which require deep knowledge of a given country's legislation and regulations. The availability of these indicators and the level of standardization are quite limited given that longitudinal data or data from less studied countries is still difficult to obtain. Moreover, as programmes differ across family types or earnings levels, the results cannot be generalized at a population level. As every study provides information on a selected range of model families, generalization to families of different sizes, structures and earnings cannot be made.

The **outcome perspective** describes the impact of family policies at the household level by the provision of evidence on the income package of households or on the use of services such as childcare.

Each of these perspectives offers a number of indicators covering a broad range of dimensions. Three basic approaches towards aggregation can be distinguished: composite indices; scorecards; and clustering countries by different types.

Several indices have been created to compare family policy across countries. Family Policy Index by Gornick and Meyers combines school scheduling, family leave and working time. OECD composite index covers work-family policies and flexible working arrangements.

Typologies divide countries into different policy regimes groups following the analysis of tax-benefits systems, day-care services, and different types of tax benefits systems. Accordingly, three different types of regimes can be distinguished: the dual-earner support regime; the general family support regime and the market-oriented regime. Geographical regimes according to the support provided to working parents with young children and generosity of leave entitlements or cash transfers have been identified (Nordic, Anglo-Saxon, Southern European and Asian, Eastern European, Continental).

Scorecards present relevant sub dimensions of family policies or offer graphical tools to represent the information captured by many indicators in a form comparable across countries; such as OECD country snapshots.

Data sources for an assessment of family policies come from a variety of sources. Expenditure is usually collected and distributed by governments or inter-/supra-national entities such as the highly standardized databases of the OECD (SOCX), EUROSTAT (ESSPROS) and ILO (Social Security Expenditure Database). Social rights data is usually collected by the scientific community and may include data on family benefit packages across countries. Data sources for outcome indicators are available in a broad selection of publications and databases.

In general, there is more and more data available in the field of family policy, partly thanks to the establishment of the OECD Family Database, which includes the three types of indicators mentioned above. The Database contains 16 family policy indicators, often consisting of a number of sub-indicators.

It is important to define the goals of family policy first and then develop relevant indicators and keep in mind that policy aims should be clearly defined throughout the evaluation process. Social rights and outcome perspectives work best in combination with other perspectives.

Concerning the social right perspective on family policies, experts noted that the denial of social rights was closely linked to social exclusion. From a social rights perspective, social citizenship depends, not only on civil and political rights, but also on social rights. Pockets of exclusion will exist if rights are granted only to part of the population. Legal rights are often not sufficient to ensure social inclusion, as their implementation lags behind social and cultural acceptance.

Some experts also expressed a concern that family policy assessment may not apply to developing countries, as the majority of them do not have explicit family policies. In general, there is an overall lack of established indicators in developing countries for any successful assessment of family policy. Developing countries need assistance in this respect. The analysis of government expenditure in developing countries could be more useful to assess the levels of public expenditure in general. It is also important to exchange good practices in family policymaking.

A point has been raised that individual and social rights are often discussed by there is no mention of family rights beyond the general mention of the right to form a family. Experts noted that often family policies aimed at increasing fertility and the only qualitative assessment used related to increased fertility.

The assessment of family policies is indispensable to showcase the impact of policies and improve them over time. It is important to develop proper indicators evaluating family policies over time, both at national and international levels. A family well-being index could be constructed to showcase the efforts made by individual Governments, where countries could be compared.

Evidence-based policy making is difficult due to the uncertainty of available data. For instance national aggregates do not take into account regional diversity. On the other hand, arguments, even lacking evidence but value-based, may be persuasive to policymakers as well. NGO representatives added that social policies are often imposed without prior consultation with civil society. The media play an important role in this respect to, e.g. to rally support for pro-family policies directed at child poverty reduction.

Experts noted that in order to encourage Government to introduce specific family policies, evidence may need to be presented on what has been working so far, both in a

country in question, or a region or beyond a region. Evidence-based policymaking helps policymakers develop policies based on evidence stemming from research, good practices, and evaluation. It's important to keep in mind that policymaking process is political and in the context of limited resources, it is important to understand not only what works but at what cost and with what results. It is important to provide information on cost-effectiveness and cost-benefits of different policy proposals.

In terms of family policy development, it is useful to refer to family capital, liabilities and resilience. Family capital could be strengthened while liabilities diminished. Resilience may be low at certain stages in life, so help is needed there as well.

Experts noted that Family Ministries are declining in numbers and children-focused agencies often replaced them. Family studies also struggle for survival as Governments move away from subject approaches (e.g. education is replaced with child studies). Although more research on families is needed, family departments in universities in many countries are disappearing, gradually being replaced by gender, childhood or gerontology departments or become limited to family counseling courses.

Confronting family poverty and social exclusion

In **OECD** countries the populations most likely to experience poverty have shifted from older persons (those over 65 years of age) to young people, children under 18 and especially the youth population (18-25), in short the next generation of parents. Moreover, child poverty is on the rise, with one in every 8 children currently living in poverty, ranging from 3.7 percent in Denmark to 26.6 in Israel.

Unemployment is the biggest risk factor for poverty OECD-wide and it can almost triple the risk of poverty. Although this varies by family types and between countries, jobless poverty rates are between 3 and 5 times higher than poverty rates among the employed. In addition, large families and sole-parent families are at higher risk of poverty due to additional costs and lower income respectively.

Several OECD countries committed to specific targets for poverty reduction. To meet those goals, they use cash benefit transfers, tax breaks on earned income as well as in-kind services, such as health, social services, childcare and education. To keep all types of families free from long-term benefit dependency, most OECD countries have made parental income support conditional on job-search and other participation commitments once the youngest child starts school. Better provision of affordable and flexible childcare is also high on OECD agenda.

In the U.S., family support is established according to 'poverty threshold' – estimated annual cost of a minimal food budget designated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and multiplied by 3. In 2011, poverty threshold in the U.S. was estimated at \$22,350 for the family of four. In 2010, 14.3 per cent of the population (44 million individuals) lived in poverty, with children most likely to be impoverished (21 per cent).

Female headed households accounted for 30 per cent of those in poverty. Means-tested programmes for families in the U.S. include Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Supplemental Security Income, Medicaid and Earned Income Tax Credit. Single-mother families are main recipients of TANF. To reduce the disadvantages of growing up in poverty, Head Start Program provides preschool children from poor families with school readiness programmes, nutritional assistance and health screenings. Housing assistance for low-income families includes vouchers for private housing and units in public housing. Currently, there is no comprehensive cash transfer programme in the U.S. to cover all poor families; instead specific high-risk populations such as mothers and children, persons with disabilities and older persons are targeted by anti-poverty policies. Evaluations indicate that the impact of anti-poverty programmes on the overall poverty reduction in the U.S. is limited but the impacts are more discernible for persons with disabilities and older persons. Many critics of social policy in the U.S. question high coverage of older persons in comparison with the coverage of children.

Several experts noted that child poverty starts in the womb and women's malnutrition will result in malnourished babies more prone to sickness later in life. New research in OECD countries indicates that children born to women living in poverty and experiencing poverty in early childhood result in negative behavioural and cognitive outcomes for them later in life, impacting even on working and earning capacity in adulthood.

Experts concluded that employment is essential for poverty reduction. Gender divisions both at home in the labour market should be closed. In the majority of families, both parents have to be employed to ensure the well-being of their families. Thus, barriers to female employment should be removed.

However, focusing solely on female employment can push children to the periphery and ignore the fact that in developing countries the majority of poor women are mothers. Focusing instead on the whole family unit would encompass the importance of encouraging both mother's and father's economic self-sufficiency as well as protecting children from harm. Flexible and good quality childcare should be made available for employed parents. Compared to tax and cash spending, public investment in childcare has been proved to be an effective investment in reducing poverty.

Policies supporting families' financial function are central to fighting family poverty. In **Eastern Europe**, most countries have developed Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers that provide medium-term macro frameworks where policies aiming at poverty reduction are included. For example, in the case of Romania and Bulgaria, national plans to combat poverty and social exclusion were formulated as part of their EU integration process in 2007.

Child poverty is of special concern in Eastern Europe and former Soviet republics, although there are wide disparities in children well-being across the region. In Tajikistan, 76 per cent of children live in poverty, with the average poverty rates in the

region reaching 25 per cent. Investment in health and education for children should naturally then be the first priority.

Another area, closely related to child and family poverty, is child abandonment and institutionalization, which are relatively widespread in Eastern Europe. Parents unable to provide for their children's basic needs may opt to place them in orphanages, thinking that they might be better off, a misconception still prevalent in parts of Eastern Europe. Reforms in the residential and foster care systems are under way to remedy the situation. Assistance to large families is also essential.

Affordable housing determines quality of life for families. Housing shortages interferes with family functioning and influences the decision of establishing a family. Shortages of affordable housing for young couples is widespread in Eastern Europe. Some Governments take steps to make it easier for young couples to afford housing, e.g. through cheaper credit or social housing provisions.

Low fertility is one of the main concerns in Eastern Europe, with some referring to it as "demographic security crisis". To reverse these trends, young families should be provided with explicit incentives and material support, through substantive child benefits, maternal benefits for all mothers, not only those in formal employment. Although the system of child allowances is quite extensive, the benefits are too small, ranging from 10 Euros per month in Slovakia to 47 Euros in Hungary. Family financial benefits range from 30 Euros in Bulgaria to 278 Euros per month in Slovenia.

Experts recommended that family policies may need to promote universal family assistance directed at every family, not disadvantaged families only. With regards to childcare, financial allowances should be provided to grandparents caring for their grandchildren, which would contribute to social protection and intergenerational solidarity. For example, in Australia, grandparents can register themselves as caregivers of their grandchildren and receive benefits.

In **Latin America**, cash transfer programmes aim to alleviate poverty through direct income transfers. They are also intended to provide incentives for investment in human capacity building and bring the target population into the social protection networks.

In Latin America, the total population below poverty line ranges from 10.4 per cent in Uruguay to 68.9 per cent in Honduras. In 18 countries of the region, cash transfers cover 25 million families (113 million individuals which amount to 19 per cent of the population of Latin American and the Caribbean). Their budget ranges from 1.17 per cent of GDP of Ecuador Bono of Human Development to 0.02 per cent of GDP of El Salvador's Rural Solidarity Communities. Source of financing for such programmes is both public and private.

Impact evaluations of cash transfer programmes indicate positive impacts on education and health outcomes as well as nutrition, especially when they were

accompanied by the distribution of food supplements. Large-scale programmes have been especially effective in reducing inequality and had some impact on poverty measures, especially by reducing the severity of poverty. In addition, despite some criticisms that cash transfers lead to dependency, no major negative impact on labour supply has been established.

Experts noted that social programmes tend to consider the presence of traditional family systems with a man as the economic provider and mother as a home-based care provider. However, this traditional family model is representative of only 20 per cent of the total number of households, and of 24 per cent of urban families in 18 Latin American countries. Currently, families in poverty and in extreme poverty are mostly female-headed. Policies often do not reach adolescent mothers, extended families, double-income and other types of families.

A question was raised if cash transfer programmes are designed to work with families as units. The analysis of several programmes indicates that although the family is a central subject of the programme, women are the most involved and participative.

Some concerns have also been raised that the programmes may inadvertently reinforce the social division of gender where women should be primarily good mothers, bearing the main responsibility for the well-being of their household. On the other hand, income transfers may empower women within their families. Overall, the programmes could not be run without the work of beneficiary women and their willingness to fulfill co-responsibilities attached to conditional cash transfers. Such programmes tend to add work only to women, even though they aim to promote the well-being of the entire family. Hence, the design of poverty alleviation programmes aimed at family units should consider relationships within families and encourage co-responsibility of all family members. It is also necessary to meet the needs of all family members, including men in vulnerable family contexts.

Fighting poverty means fighting inequality, both within and outside the family. That is why the programmes should consider different needs of family members and require a gender stand which should be focused on women as well as men and children. Moreover, families living in poverty should be active agents in the fight against the cycle of poverty, and the programmes should advocate their full participation in the design and improvement of particular strategies.

So far, the programmes do not stimulate the poor to organize themselves to develop their social capital. The programmes have also been criticized for being blind to inter-family relations and gender inequality.

To counteract these criticisms, experts recommended incorporating the diversity of family needs and taking into account the diversity of poor Latin American families. Strategies to improve gender equality are needed. There is also a need to (a) clarify the mechanisms of selection to enter and leave the programmes and to (b) educate and raise awareness in families of their rights and responsibilities if the programmes are to

succeed. In addition, financial benefits are not always most effective and services may be more effective than cash transfers

In **Africa**, the main challenge remains food insecurity with small-scale subsistence agriculture offering insecure livelihoods and exposing families to environment and climate change risks.

Africans are vulnerable to a large number of health risks including HIV/AIDS pandemic which results in high mortality as well as a growing number of children orphaned and made vulnerable by the epidemic, with older persons taking care of the young ones. The HIV and AIDS epidemic has also aggravated threats posed by malaria, reproductive health challenges and other vulnerabilities, testing the informal coping mechanisms traditionally offered by extended family systems in Africa.

In response to persistent poverty, family vulnerability and long-term threats to human capital of children, new commitments to social protection have been initiated. Policies aiming to (a) protect people against risk and vulnerability and to (b) help people secure basic livelihoods range from labour market policies, social insurance programmes, social assistance, micro and area-based schemes, and child protection. Such programmes have had a positive impact on access to nutrition, health services and education, protecting the most vulnerable from destitution, promoting economic growth, assisting in building social cohesion and promoting social stability.

Social protection provision has an immediate effect on families averting their fall into extreme poverty. In the longer term, they have transformational functions and prevent the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

Despite pronounced commitments to social protection for families in Africa, the actual coverage is quite small and mostly limited to contributory schemes that apply to salaried workers only. As most women in wage employment are in the informal sector, they do not benefit from a variety of social protection schemes. Moreover, in case of family break-ups or widowhood, women are often not entitled to present or future unemployment or pension benefits.

A review of 39 Sub-Saharan countries indicated that although over half of the countries have a form of family allowance, such as programmes or regular cash payments providing additional income for families with young children to at least partially cover the costs of their support; most of such allowances are means-tested. Eligibility benefits are calculated by measuring individual or family resources against a calculated standard based on subsistence needs. Targeted benefits may reduce Governments' direct costs but evidence shows that often needy families are excluded. Moreover, means-tested targeting in Africa is often costly and inefficient in reaching the poorest, with many Governments lacking the administrative capacity for effective targeting.

Non-contributory social protection provided by the state is still largely undeveloped and has been restricted to a handful of countries in East and Southern

Africa. Moreover, studies indicate that there is little political will for serious implementation of social protection programmes in the face of national and household food insecurity.

In Southern Africa, child support grants and non-contributory income transfers for older persons are provided. The old age pensions are considered an effective policy response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic as older persons care for young children in households without members of working ages. Research indicates that these grants and pensions are used for children's education and healthcare costs. Various valuations show that such benefits also contribute to social inclusion, reduction in child labour and help stop the intergenerational transfer of poverty.

In Middle Africa, social protection mechanisms are not as well established and mostly consist of ad hoc programmes such as income transfers or cash transfers with service delivery. They have emerged as a result of policy engagement with social policy and social protection in Sub-Saharan Africa and are delivered by international donor agencies and civil society in addition to Governmental agencies. Their long-term sustainability has been put into question due to the lack of institutionalization and low domestic ownership.

Despite evidence of positive impact on cash transfers on development, including encouragement for investing in assets that increase people's chances of breaking out of poverty, there are many challenges to their effective implementation. Moreover, despite evidence pointing to the contrary, in Africa, cash transfers are believed to reduce labour market participation and divert resources from other social services. Moreover, there are concerns about their long-term financial viability in light of fiscal constraints. There are also limitations in technical and institutional capacity to formulate, deliver and evaluate transfers.

To achieve comprehensive social protection to reduce family poverty in Africa, it is important to improve the overall understanding of social protection by documenting best practices worldwide and establishing guidelines for extending basic benefit entitlement; improve coverage by technical assistance projects; and undertake training and policy discussion with stakeholders. It is also important to ensure that social protection programmes are domestically grown as they tend to be more likely to succeed in mobilizing national political constituencies and not regarded as foreign concept.

Experts pointed out that cash transfers and food subsidies are mostly limited to Southern Africa and Eastern Africa, they are limited in scale and are targeted to individuals (e.g., older individuals), not the entire family as a unit. Nevertheless, the benefits are shared with other family members and grandparents tend to invest in their grandchildren's education and healthcare.

Among the recommendations, experts pointed out that social protection should be seen as an investment in human capital and seen as prevention of intergenerational

transfer of poverty. Although there are fiscal constraints, a small investment of GDP in social protection proved to have a large impact on poverty reduction.

Family poverty in **Asia** is closely related to social exclusion. Families are trapped in poverty due to lack of employment and access to basic services, poor housing, electricity and a safe water supply. Many are excluded from the benefits of economic growth or social development programmes.

Anti-poverty, family-oriented programmes take the form of social security benefits in cash or in-kind. In-kind benefits, including subsidized food and school nutrition programmes are considered to be more effective than cash-transfers, which are criticized for costly administration, diversion of funds to graft, creating dependency and as being a political move to get electoral votes.

Other programmes provide economic aid to the cost of living or offer child support. In China, the Minimum Living Standard Assistance programme provides a basic cash benefit. It has lowered poverty but its coverage and delivery need to be improved. A child grant (until 16 years of age) is provided to families with one child. In Indonesia, a cash transfer programme was launched in 2000 but was discontinued due to difficulties in programme administration. A pilot conditional cash transfer programme is currently under way in the Philippines.

Social security spending in Asia is mainly invested in pensions (Malaysia – 6.5 per cent of GDP, China 2.7 per cent and India 2 per cent). According to ILO studies, even low-income countries can afford basic social security if they have strong public institutions, sustained productivity, political will and the capacity to raise additional revenues.

Capacity-building, such as public works programmes and supplementary employment opportunities among the rural poor, however, is often considered a more effective and sustainable way to reduce poverty. Successful anti-poverty programmes financed by the private sector mostly focus on education, health, housing and sanitation.

Elderly poverty and growing cost of care for an increasing number of older persons is of concern in Asia. Family support for the care of older persons, having its roots in filial piety, is diminishing with the decreasing number of multigenerational households, increasing rate of female labour participation, rural to urban migration and other factors. Further, formal social security coverage programmes in the Southeast and East Asian countries have very low coverage for older adults. Families should be assisted with the costs of elderly care and social security benefits should be expanded.

Families may also be overburdened with caring for sick or disabled family members. In Southeast Asia, diarrhea, malaria, measles and dengue are relatively common diseases with families bearing the burden of direct expenses for care of ill family members. Urgent attention should be paid to improve healthcare infrastructure and

information systems, increase funding for epidemiological research, and ensure the training of health professionals.

In China, the Minimum Living Standard Assurance (MLSA or Dibao), has become gradually more generous in supporting poor families but still lags behind the increasing consumption levels. The rural MLSA assistance averages 42 per cent of the urban one. Eligibility criteria are strict, excluding many (e.g. rural-urban immigrants). The administration of these programmes should be more efficient to remove barriers and improve accessibility. The number of urban beneficiaries increased from 0.8 million to 4.0 million by 2000 and rose sharply to 23 million in 2004, accounting for around 4 per cent of the urban population. The programme has recently reached 52.3 million rural beneficiaries. Studies indicate that only 28 to 51 per cent of eligible families were actual beneficiaries. Children, women, older persons and persons with disabilities were the main beneficiaries of Dibao programme. Current research indicates that the programme has had modest impacts on poverty reduction. Poor families face various needs, which cannot be addressed by limited benefits of MLSA programme. Recent empirical studies noted that families receiving the benefits mostly used the extra money to pay for medicine or other health-related expenses, as well as tuition fees for non-compulsory education. In order to address those needs, the Chinese Government provided additional benefits such as Medical Assistance Programme, as well as education, housing and work support subsidies. Despite a steady growth in anti-poverty family policies, they are still marginal in coverage and far from effectively impacting on poverty.

It is well understood that cash transfer programmes are not aimed at eliminating but reducing poverty and they have not been found to create dependency. The goal of the conditional cash transfers is to improve the situation of children, so that they have better prospects in life.

The situation of migrants is particularly dire as they are not eligible for social programmes and usually do not have a family support network. Although remittances help reduce poverty, the impact of separations of family members for long periods of time has negative consequences for families, especially children, as well as marital stability.

Experts noted that it would be advisable to initiate regional discussions on anti-poverty programmes, like cash transfers, social protection benefits, capacity building, programmes to overcome child and older persons' poverty and other strategies in order to learn from successes and failures in different regions. Specifically, the reasons for the lack of success of cash transfer programmes in Asia should be evaluated.

Work-family balance: the importance of family-focused solutions

Although sometimes it is assumed that maternity protection at work is the main issue of concern here, work-family balance issues relate to both men and women as men also need work family balance to spend more time with their families.

Types of work-family balance policies include (1) sequential system, alternating work and family, e.g. part-time work and flexible work; (2) derivative system – subsidies for private care services; and (3) redistributing duties (e.g., supporting paternity leave).

Legal framework for work-family balance

The ILO Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention (No. 156) and Recommendation No. 165 in 1985 stipulate that the full exercise of the right to work implies that family responsibilities cannot constitute cause for discrimination or restrict access to jobs. The instruments recommend that States implement policies ensuring more equal distribution of care responsibilities.

The latest ILO Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183) broadens the protection and makes it more effective. A recent ILO review in 167 member states indicates that there have been improvements in maternity protection legislation with longer rest periods at childbirth, and shift away from employer's liability systems of financing maternity leaves. Employers, accountable to their shareholders, have fears of lower productivity of workers with parental responsibilities. It's important to note that parental leave provision is a co-responsibility by the state, private sector and families.

Work-family balance in developed countries

Maternity and paternity leaves are well-established in Western Europe. Within Europe the European Union has been a key pan-governmental body for formulating work-family reconciliation frameworks. The EU Directive on Parental Leave in 1996, setting a minimum standard of job-protected three months, unpaid parental leave for all employees across Europe, was a hall-mark piece of legislation.

With regard to Eastern Europe, maternity leaves are generally generous but paternity leave has only started to be introduced in the region and still is shorter than the recommended 2 weeks, ranging from 5 days in Hungary and Poland to 15 days in Latvia. Slovenia's Parenthood Protection and Family Benefits Act (2006) offer 105 days for maternity leave and 260 days of parental leave, both with full salary.

Child benefits range from 27 Euros per month in Hungary to 10 Euros in Slovakia. Average family financial benefits provided by family policies range from 30 Euros in Bulgaria to 278 Euros in Slovenia.

Experts recommended that financial allowances be provided to support the care provided by grandparents. Some measures have already been taken in Hungary, where child home care allowance is offered for parents and grandparents caring for children under 2 years of age. Another interesting initiative in Eastern Europe is a family-friendly workplace award to recognize companies supporting family-work balanced life (around 11,250 Euros) paid by the Ministry for Social Affairs and Labour of Hungary.

More generally across developed countries organizations and Governments are providing employees with care responsibilities an opportunity to work *flexibly* in ‘*family-friendly*’ contexts. A key impetus behind the introduction of flexible working was criticism of the “long working hours culture” of employees, particularly for male employees.

A recent survey of mothers in Europe indicates that mothers prefer to organize their own reconciliation of work and family in accordance with their time-use preference; employment options; age, number, and needs of children; spouse and family support or care needs as well as other circumstances. Large number of mothers would prefer reduced working hours when children are young, especially when public child care is expensive and of poor quality. Not having enough time with their families and working excessively is associated with fatigue, stress, and fear of poor outcomes in family stability as well as children’s behaviour and scholastic success. Mothers who do not work outside the home, express anxiety over poverty in old age as they will solely depend on their spouses’ pension and would welcome pension credit for unpaid care work for family members.

Father-inclusive family policies

Historically, work-family policies aimed to protect the health of mothers after childbirth and sustain women’s participation in the labour force. Increasingly, however, the importance of fathers in families is being noted. As the number of dual-earner families has grown, the joint working time of couples with dependent children has increased, necessitating focusing on both parents and their family-work balance needs.

In addition, there is increasing evidence that paternal behaviours matter for children contributing to their emotional development, educational attainment and overall well-being, including professional success later in life. Paternal and partner support to mothers also contribute to fairer distribution of household duties. Father-inclusive family policies are then necessary to ensure children well-being, gender-equality and better sharing of family obligations. Work-balance strategies are a key to helping achieve these goals.

Father-sensitive work-family leave packages give fathers the opportunity to spend more time at home leading to stimulating paternal involvement in the care and well-being of children. As research indicates, paternity leave has the potential to support mothers and enhance fathers’ emotional connection with infants.

As documented by the Project on Global Working Families, fathers have a paid statutory entitlement to paternity leave or paid parental leave in 66 countries, whereas paid maternity leave is provided in 169 countries. Benefits vary by length, payment and flexibility and whether it is an individual or family entitlement. Some countries have adopted father enhancement schemes through incentives, penalty or compulsion. Research shows that fathers are most likely to use parental leave when high income replacement (50% or more) is combined with extended leave length (more than 14 days).

In some regions, paternal involvement, especially in early childhood, is still rare and there is a need for awareness raising to change public perceptions.

Family policies should move towards a dual-earner family model supporting both men and women's caring and earning responsibilities. Father-inclusiveness should be part of a modern family policy. National entities should explore systems to recognize and support caring activities by men in families, including paternity leave at a child's birth or parental leave later but still early in a child's life.

Some stereotypes of men incapable of taking care of their children prevail and many men are reluctant to take parental leave for fear of job loss. In addition, there is limited research on masculinity and men's roles in families. It is important to explain the importance of men in families and improve demographic as well as reproductive and health issues data on men.

Work-family balance in developing countries

Work-family balance issues in Asia are closely related to increasing women's participation in the labour force, higher career aspirations and somewhat diminishing sense of filial piety. Work-life balance places a heavy burden on dual-earner families in terms of stress and stress-related illnesses, overwork and childcare arrangements. Demographic changes including lower fertility rates, longer life expectancy, decreasing number of extended households, growing divorce rates and increasing numbers of single parents are testing the strength of family values typical to Asian families.

State commitment to work-family balance in Asia is weak, with only two countries, (Japan and Republic of Korea), having ratified the ILO Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention. Singapore has the most comprehensive programme promoting work-life balance including a wide range of policies and benefits to encourage working parents to have more children. Work-Life Works programme is offered to businesses to introduce work-life programmes.

Maternity leave is offered by employers with benefits ranging from 52 days in Nepal to around 180 days in Vietnam, but compliance with maternity leave regulations are often problematic. Moreover, many women do not avail themselves of the full-length benefits for fear of losing their jobs. Paternity leaves range from 3 to 15 days. Many men believe that they are risking job security by taking paternity leave.

Child-care facilities are not readily available in the region and a very few companies provide daycare centres as the reliance on childcare within the family is very strong in Asia. Flexible working arrangements are rarely offered and long working hours are the norm in most enterprises. More informal arrangements are often in place, however, where permission is granted to leave the workplace due to family reasons (e.g. Philippines).

As noted by the 2011 ADB/ILO report on *Women in Labour Markets in Asia*, informal employment expose women to more work interruption and decreased productivity leading to lower income, less social protection, less access to skills upgrading, and no benefit from an organized bargaining power. Legal protection and benefits for informal workers; training in entrepreneurship skills; and launching of communication campaigns highlighting the social value to caregiving is therefore recommended.

Many experts noted the importance of increased men's participation in household responsibilities and childcare for work-family balance. Research in Asia, however, indicates very low involvement of men in household chores. What's more, some findings suggest that men's involvement in household duties and childcare is largely not expected by women.

In addition, the presence of domestic helpers facilitates to balance career and family in many Asian families. There is little knowledge, however, of their qualitative contributions as domestic work is generally undocumented or even excluded from the legislative action. Professionalizing domestic service continues to be a challenge.

In a developing country context, parenthood related policies compete with a large number of social development issues. All African countries have statutory maternity leave; little progress has been made, however, with paternity leave. There is no legal right to request flexible working arrangements. Given the low per capita income in most countries in Africa, shorter but paid periods of leave could be advisable. Also, it is important to establish how family rituals and routines interact with workplace requirements.

Experts noted that any work-family balance mechanisms to be instituted in developing countries should be evidence-based and some 'family-friendly' institutional arrangements may not be appropriate for all countries. Also, despite a widely offered argument that limited resources prevent governments in many developing countries from providing family support, context-specific research to identify the most appropriate support mechanisms for families should be conducted to identify the best options.

Several experts noted that in some countries, childcare at an early age is encouraged with potential detrimental effects for child-wellbeing. One model of work-family balance is encouraged, with women in labour force and children in childcare. It is important to offer parents a choice about childcare arrangements, such as stay home care, extended family support or other arrangements. In essence, childcare should be decided by parents based on their child's individual needs. It should be recognized that family care for children is also work but unpaid work; whereas subsidies are given for outside childcare, no financial incentives are given to family caregivers. Parental choices should be supported and financial subsidies offered for different forms of care, according to parental preferences.

An NGO representative noted that family life is more adapted to employment requirements than work arrangements are to family life. Unpaid work is an important contributor to societal well-being, including current household consumption and future well-being, such as parental investment in raising children, as well as community well-being, e.g. through voluntary work. Between one-third and half of all valuable economic activity in OECD countries is not accounted for in GDP. Some experts suggested that work at home should be recognized through avenues such as tax deductions.

In conclusion, experts noted that access to leave should be accompanied by other measures, such as pre-natal support, home care work of other family members, improvement of parental competencies. It is also important to invest in training, mentoring and counseling in the work place. In order to have cohesive societies, we need to develop a vision of what kind of societies we want and what measures have to be taken to achieve that. It is also vital to have role models to generate acceptability, e.g. politicians availing themselves of paternity leave in Scandinavian countries. Families should be provided with choices and allowed to make the choices best for them.