



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

Concept Note

United Nations Expert Group Meeting,
New York
15 – 16 May 2018

“Family policies for inclusive societies”

Background

The Division for Social Policy and Development (DSPD) of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) is organizing an Expert Group Meeting on “Family policies for inclusive societies”, 15-16 May 2018 at UN Headquarters in New York.

In its recent resolution on family issues, the General Assembly invited Member States to invest in a variety of family-oriented policies and programmes, as important tools for, inter alia, fighting poverty, social exclusion and inequality, promoting work-family balance and gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls and advancing social integration and intergenerational solidarity, to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.¹

The importance of family policies for the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1-5 relating to poverty and hunger reduction, health, education and gender equality was addressed by expert group meetings held in 2015 and 2016. The current meeting aims to analyse the importance of family policies for the achievement of SDG 16 - promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, and SDG11 - making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

Regional perspectives on family policies for inclusive societies

¹ Follow-up to the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family and beyond (A/RES/72/145, of 18 December 2018) OP.3

Due to current levels of development as well as economic, demographic and cultural factors, the approach to family policies for inclusive societies varies. In some regions emphasis is placed on social inclusion of different types of families and/or individuals such as migrants and members of their families, indigenous families, ethnic minorities or families with persons with disabilities.

In many countries emphasis is placed on social protection for vulnerable families as means towards their full inclusion in the mainstream society. Similarly, inclusive education, especially for children from ethnic minorities is considered essential to full social integration.

Migrant families

Restrictive family reunification policies prevent migrants from achieving social inclusion with research demonstrating that there are profound human costs to limiting family reunification. Such costs are typically disproportionately borne by immigrant women and impact immigrant integration and belonging in host countries. Moreover, migrants and refugees face discrimination and limited access to social protection in the host countries while social protection benefits from home countries may be lost if they are not portable across borders.

Children in migrant and refugee families merit distinctive attention. Special policies, such as inclusive education programmes, host country language classes, universal access to preschool and afterschool programmes can reduce disadvantages among immigrant children. Investments in professionals working with immigrant and refugee families, including teachers and social workers may also be needed.

Indigenous families & families with persons with disabilities

Challenges to indigenous families' social inclusion include geographic isolation, inadequate infrastructure, discrimination and linguistic barriers among others. Inclusive education, such as bilingual education and promoting of involvement of indigenous peoples in the design and implementation of specific policies can help overcome such barriers.²

As stipulated in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) 'persons with disabilities and their family members should receive the necessary protection and assistance to enable families to contribute towards the full and equal enjoyment of the rights of persons with disabilities'.

Yet, families with persons with disabilities are often invisible in policy and programmes with negative attitudes and prejudices prevailing. As the family and not the professional is the constant in the life of a child with a disability and the

² "Promoting inclusion through social protection' Report on the World Social Situation (RWSS) 2017. Executive summary

family is the best positioned to determine the needs of the child, it is then vital to empower such families to provide adequate care and support to their children.³

The inclusive education of children with disabilities is indispensable for their social inclusion and a sense of belonging. In some countries curriculums have been adapted to teaching methods and forms of assessment that cover a wide range of learning needs.⁴

Family oriented social protection

Social protection measures play an important role to ensure social inclusion and reduce poverty but remain a right unfulfilled for most children and families.⁵ Scaling up of such policies and programmes, ensuring their financial sustainability and targeting vulnerable families is indispensable for the achievement of several development goals including building of inclusive societies.

The effectiveness of social protection and other programmes depends on how well they respond to the needs of vulnerable families. Cash transfers for families can be considered part of social protection but although conditional cash transfers have been a critical tool for poverty reduction and have been credited with better education and health outcomes in poor families, “the social protection as a whole has not been successful in allowing people to graduate from support programmes” or create incentives for women’s entrance in the labour market.”⁶

Many vulnerable families lack access to social protection. “Understanding the barriers that diverse groups face in accessing social protection is necessary if substantial coverage is to be ensured for all nations, peoples and segments of society.”⁷

Member States have been encouraged to provide universal and gender-sensitive social protection systems, including targeted cash transfers for families in vulnerable situations.⁸ The social protection coverage of families with children is still low in most of developing countries. Governments spend only 1.1% of GDP in child and family benefits (excluding health expenditures). Such coverage is insufficient and leaves many vulnerable families with children socially excluded.

³ Diane Richler “The Exclusion of families with children with disabilities’

<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/family/docs/egm12/PRESENTATION-RICHLER.pdf>

⁴ Report of the Secretary-General on promoting social integration through social inclusion, 21 July 2017 (A/72/189)

⁵ International Labour Organization “*World Social Protection Report 2014/15*”, Geneva, International Labour Office, 2014)

⁶ Ibid, p. 47

⁷ “Promoting inclusion through social protection’ Report on the World Social Situation (RWSS) 2017. Executive summary, p. 2

⁸ A/RES/72/145, op.6

Inclusive education for children from vulnerable families

In the Agenda for Sustainable Development, 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.”⁹ Moreover, in its recent resolution on ‘promoting social integration through social inclusion’, the General Assembly stressed the importance of ‘promoting inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all... as essential means for inclusive participation and integration in society.’¹⁰

In many countries children in migrant families as well as those from ethnic minorities lack access to education which jeopardizes their social inclusion. As inclusive education reduces inequality in children’s life and improves their prospects in life, in some countries efforts are underway to invest in education of children from new immigrant families and offer life-long learning opportunities for their parents to facilitate their integration in the host countries. Similarly, language and cultural courses focusing on children from ethnic minorities have facilitated social inclusion of children from diverse economic, social and ethnic backgrounds.

Inclusive urbanization with intergenerational perspective

Making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable is the focus of SDG11. Targets 11.3 and 11.7 include enhancing inclusive and sustainable urbanization and providing universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible green and public spaces, in particular for women and children and older persons.

In addition, the General Assembly encouraged Member States to invest in family policies and programmes that promote strong intergenerational interactions, such as intergenerational living arrangements and parenting education, in an effort to promote inclusive urbanization, intergenerational solidarity and social cohesion.¹¹

From a family perspective, urban planning should consider the needs of all generations and facilitate interactions among them. Family-friendly cities should be accessible to all generations and people with different needs. Public spaces where people of different ages can meet and interact are indispensable for socially integrated communities and societies. Here, investing in

⁹ Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (A/RES/70/1), para. 25

¹⁰ Promoting social inclusion through social integration (A/RES/72/142, op.4 of 19 December 2017)

¹¹ A/RES/72/145, op.5

intergenerational spaces, encompassing schools and senior centres helps in daily interactions between children, adolescents and older persons.¹²

Incentives for living in proximity with parents and/or intergenerational living arrangements within a multigenerational household are supported in some countries. Such arrangements usually strengthen intergenerational bonds and may result in reciprocal caring arrangements between younger and older generations.

Purpose

The primary objective of the Meeting is to bring together international experts to discuss and explore the issue noted above. The conclusions and recommendations of this meeting will provide Member States and other stakeholders with expert analysis regarding a number of issues impacting recent family policy developments in the context of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and relevant General Assembly resolutions.

Methodology

Experts will be asked to provide a paper, make a short presentation, participate in group discussions and give their expert opinion and policy recommendations on family policy development, monitoring and implementation in the areas mentioned above. The experts are also expected to provide specific examples of good practices in family policy making and offer detailed recommendations on further development of policies, programmes and strategies supporting families in the areas noted above.

Outcomes

Background papers (5-7 pages, single-spaced, excluding references and statistical tables) prepared by each expert on issues in the annotated agenda and including policy recommendations. Report of the meeting containing the summary of discussion and policy recommendations prepared by DSPD/DESA.

Papers by experts will cover issues identified in the agenda, explain their relevance, provide quantitative and qualitative evidence, analyse the roles of social institutions, give examples of good practices, offer conclusions and recommendations. The report and experts' papers will be posted on the website of the DSPD/DESA.

¹² Report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of the objectives of the International Year of the Family and its follow-up processes, 18 July 2017 (A/72/166)