



**United
Nations**

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs



INTERNATIONAL
DAY OF FAMILIES
15 MAY 2020

Background Note

Copenhagen + 25

This year's 25th anniversary of the World Summit for Social Development comes at the time of one of the most challenging global health and social crises. The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic brings into sharp focus the importance of investing in social policies protecting the most vulnerable individuals and families. It is the families who bear the brunt of the crisis, sheltering their members from harm, caring for out of school children and at the same time continuing their work responsibilities. Families become the hub of intergenerational interactions that support us in the crisis. Under economic duress poverty deepens. In times of uncertainty stress increases often resulting in growing violence against women and children. That is why the support for vulnerable families, those who lost income, those in

inadequate housing, those with young children, older persons and persons with disabilities is imperative now more than ever.

Families are both beneficiaries but most importantly agents of development. The role of families in development was recognized by the World Summit for Social Development in its Copenhagen Declaration. The message of Copenhagen still rings true after a quarter century of development: “The goals and objectives of social development require continuous efforts to reduce and eliminate major sources of social distress and instability for the family and for society.” The Governments pledged to “place particular focus on and give priority attention to the fight against the world-wide conditions that pose severe threats to the health, safety, peace, security and well-being of our people.”

The Copenhagen Declaration recognized the family as the basic unit of society and acknowledged that it plays a key role in development and is entitled to receive comprehensive protection and support. Governments further recognized that the family should be strengthened, with attention to the rights, capabilities and responsibilities of its members. It is important to remind us that the Declaration also recognized that “in different cultural, political and social systems various forms of family exist”.

World Social Summit (WSS) pioneered the concept of work-family balance recommending fostering policies that enable people to combine their paid work with their family

responsibilities. It further acknowledged the importance of promoting equal partnership between women and men in family and community life; emphasized men's shared responsibility and promoted their active involvement in responsible parenthood. The Programme of Action of the WSS recognized family's supporting, educating and nurturing roles contributing to social integration. It recommended social and economic policies designed to meet the needs of families with a particular attention to the care of children.

These recommendations guided the activities relating to the International Year of the Family (IYF) and its follow-up processes. The preparations for the 20th anniversary of the IYF focused in much detail on specific recommendations in the areas of family poverty reduction, improvements in work-family balance and advancing social integration and intergenerational solidarity.

The work on family policies continues in the context of Sustainable Development Goals. The relevance of supportive family-oriented policies for the achievement of SDGs, especially those relating to poverty, health and well-being, education and gender equality have been the focus of Expert Group Meetings, International Day of Families observances and a myriad of awareness raising and advocacy events. The question arises: to what extent Governments took on board family-oriented policies in their overall socio-economic policy making towards the achievement of SDGs?

That question is addressed in the report: *Family related policies and priorities in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as reported in the Voluntary National Reviews of 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019* to be launched on the occasion of the 2020 International Day of Families. The review of the VNRs 2016-2019 finds that families and family-oriented policies are considered very important in ensuring progress towards the SDGs with close to 90 per cent of Governments featuring references to families. Families are considered as units of diagnosis or as targets in the areas of poverty and hunger reduction, healthcare and reproductive health issues, gender and age-based violence and in the context of gender inequalities in care, household responsibilities and overall work-family balance. However, family-oriented policies lag in many national policies and SDG strategies with a small number of countries reporting specific family policies as part of their SDG strategies. The report offers detailed analysis of a variety of policies in support of SDG targets from a family perspective and advocates for the inclusion of families from a holistic and impact lens perspective in the design, implementation and monitoring process of SDGs. The importance of investing in family-oriented policies for the achievement of specific targets under SDGs 1-5, 11 and 16 is analyzed and specific recommendations are offered. The report aims to encourage Governments to invest in family-oriented policies contributing to the achievement of crucial SDGs.

This year's celebration of the International Day of Families reminds us that the goals of Copenhagen are still relevant in the rapidly changing world. World Social Summit as well as the International Year of the Family and its follow-up processes have served as catalysts for integrating a family perspective into overall social policy making. Further advancement of family policy in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development depends on how well issues of family policy are integrated into the overall development planning at national levels. It is imperative that such policies effectively respond to the numerous challenges faced by families in a rapidly changing world now facing an unprecedented global health and social crisis.