

*Mega Trends and Families: The Impact of Demographic Shifts, International Migration and Urbanization, Climate Change, and Technological Transformations*

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## ***Mega Trends and Families: The Impact of Demographic Shifts, International Migration and Urbanization, Climate Change, and Technological Transformations***

As we move further into the twenty-first century, multiple trends are projected to impact individuals and families in every aspect of their lives. UNDESA has identified the mega-trends of demographic change, international migration and urbanization, climate change and technological change as critical to societal functioning. These trends are bound to have profound implications for families and their local and global communities. What we have learned from history is that families, in all their various constellations, are constantly evolving and responding to changes in the social systems in which they are embedded. However, in 2020 we are also facing the unexpected crisis of COVID-19. It remains to be seen if some of the mega-trends projected to affect societies, will be accelerated, decreased or barely affected by this global pandemic. Whatever the outcomes may be, COVID-19 has drawn attention to the fact that humans need intimate others for physical and emotional support and that for many individuals, families however they are defined, are still that source of security and comfort. Unfortunately, the crisis has also highlighted that in some cases, family membership can be extremely stressful and even be associated with violence. This phenomenon is exacerbated in times of isolation such as during the global shelter in place policies associated with COVID-19. It is thus, imperative that we utilize the knowledge that we are gaining from this pandemic in conjunction with information about current societal mega-trends to inform our future programs and policies that support and strengthen families (Anant, & Gassman-Pines, 2020). It is only through an informed approach based on empirical evidence that the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals can be realized in totality.

### **Demographic Change**

Despite a popular Western discourse that families are “losing their importance” in the lives of individuals, recent research indicates that attitudes towards long-term relationships, marriage, and divorce seem to be making only minor shifts (Berger & Carlson, 2020; Esping-Andersen & Billari, 2015; Smock & Schwartz, 2020). In fact in an analysis of European family life Esping-Andersen and Billari (2015) argue that the projected evolution towards “ ‘less family’: fewer marriages and children; greater couple instability” may actually be reversing and that “the projected erosion of the family is problematic and possibly invalid....Studies of family values and attitudes show a surprising degree of preference stability...” (p. 3). And a recent comprehensive report by UN Women (2019), states that “in many regions, including Central and Southern Asia, Eastern and South-Eastern Asia and Northern Africa and Western Asia, long-lasting heterosexual marriages continue to be universal” (p. 50). When viewed from a global lens, the evidence indicates that there is a great deal of variation with respect to family trends based on regionality, economic conditions, social class, education, policies and other social factors, however, family life continues to dominate as central to much of the human experience.

#### *Household Composition, Formation and Dissolution*

Across the world households composed of a couple with children account for approximately 38.4 percent of all homes around the world (UN Women, 2019). These households may contain

married partners, cohabiting adults, or re-partnered couples. Extended families, especially in non-Western countries are also quite common, making up about 26.6 percent of all households and lone-partner households are estimated at about 7.5 percent. Typically, lone-partner families are headed by women (about 84.3 percent) who have children, are working, and may also be caring for other dependents. Female run households with children tend to be the most vulnerable to poverty and at times are also stigmatized and discriminated against depending on social and cultural context (Cherlin, 2020; UN Women, 2019).

A widespread global trend is that the age of marriage for women and men is rising. In part, this is associated with the need for greater education to enter the labor force and / or the precariousness of employment for young people. Increased occupational opportunities for girls and women have also contributed to this trend (Cherlin, 2020). Women, however, still tend to be younger than men when entering long-term unions. Despite the global spread of cultural norms and practices that are encouraging women to marry later, in certain regions of the world, especially in rural areas in Sub-Saharan Africa and Central and Southern Asia, child marriage is still prevalent (UNFPA, 2012). Child marriage is associated with highly detrimental outcomes for girls and women with respect to accessing educational and occupational opportunities and often leaves them and their families in a continuous cycle of poverty.<sup>1</sup>

It is increasingly common around the world for young people to choose their own long-term partners. As parental control over spousal choice has lessened, partner choice based on “romantic love” is becoming the norm. Communication technologies such as the Internet and social media are spreading ideals of intimate relationships and families that are based on chosen love rather than founded on traditional social obligations and the reproduction of kinship systems (Padilla et al. 2007). Concurrently, cohabitation is becoming more common even in areas of the world and among groups where living together before marriage would have been unthinkable several decades ago such as among educated women in Latin America and the Caribbean (United Nations Women, 2019). The rise in cohabitation is closely correlated with a slight decrease in marriage as more couples may test out the option of living together or even completely forego marriage such as is common among younger people in the North European countries.<sup>2</sup>

Divorce is also becoming more common globally. While divorce rates have stabilized and even fallen in the United States, in other parts of the world they are rising due to a variety of factors including an emphasis on romantic love in marriage, women’s increased economic opportunities, a decrease in employment opportunities for some men, and alternatives to marital relationships (United Nations Women, 2019). However, global aggregates of statistics are deceiving as there are significant differences between and within countries. For instance, in South Asia, divorce has doubled over the last twenty years, however only 1.1 percent of women are divorcees and most of them live in urban areas. Divorce often makes women more economically vulnerable and thus, is not necessarily always an attractive option for individuals in problematic relationships.

<sup>1</sup> These findings are all the more disturbing when juxtaposed with the fact that the global leading cause of death for girls aged 15 to 19 is complications from pregnancy and childbirth.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, in Denmark 59.4%, Iceland, 57.3% and France 57.2% of women aged 25 – 29 have chosen to cohabit instead of marry (UN Women, 2019).

While in some regions divorce is becoming more popular, we cannot project that this is a universal trend which we will see continuing to increase in the future. As Esping-Andersen and Billari (2015) point out, family trends often stabilize depending on local condition, and thus, may not necessarily shift over the next several decades.<sup>3</sup>

### *Fertility and Aging*

Some of the most dramatic and long-term changes affecting families and societies in the future are associated with demographic changes related to declining fertility rates and the aging of many human populations. Overall, the global fertility rate has fallen from 3.2 births per woman in 1990 to 2.5 in 2019 and it is expected to decrease even more to 2.2 in 2050 (UN Population, 2019). Currently, about half of all people around the world live in a place where fertility is below 2.1 births per woman over a lifetime. For instance, in almost half of all OECD countries, there are no children in the household anymore (OECD, 2011). Overall however, the global population is growing with great variations in fertility between regions.

According to United Nations population predictions, the world's population is projected to increase from 7.8 billion in 2020 to 8.5 billion in 2030, and to 9.7 billion in 2050. Much of this growth is occurring in some of the poorest regions in the world especially in sub-Saharan Africa where the population is expected to double by 2050 (UN Population, 2019). Oceania excluding Australia/New Zealand and North Africa and Western Asia are expected to grow by about 56% and 46% respectively. Population growth in these low-income regions contributes to the challenges of eradicating poverty and implementing many if not all of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. On a more positive note, there is a “demographic dividend” associated with increased population growth as the working-age population is growing in those areas. Concurrently however, as the population is substantially increasing in low-income regions, the populations of high-income countries in Europe and North America are projected to increase by only two percent and in East and South-East Asia by three percent. The Latin American countries and the Caribbean are projected to grow by about 18 percent and Central and Southern Asia by 25 percent.

The lowered fertility of so many societies is result of various factors that come together in differing ways depending on context. Empirical research however indicates that with a general shift towards greater gender equity, the growing importance of self-realization, and greater freedom of choice, women are increasingly deciding not to have children. Specifically, the difficulty in reconciling work and family responsibilities is associated with lowered fertility, in high-income contexts (Chin, Lee, Son & Sung, 2012). In poorer environments, children increase family vulnerability to poverty. The financial burden of children combined with a lack of adequate child care options force parents, and often specifically women out of gainful employment (Keck & Saraceno, 2013). When families face the prospect of reduced income coupled with increased care needs, the decision to limit fertility is heightened.

### *Fertility Is Impacting the Age Structure of Populations*

A defining characteristic of many contemporary societies has been the historical transformation from societies with low life expectancies and high birth rates to ones with high life expectancies

<sup>3</sup> As an example, in the United States divorce rose from the late 1960s through the mid-1980s and then began to fall again (Smock & Schwartz, 2020).

and low birth rates. While this has not occurred uniformly across the world, this shift has been transformational. The most significant impact of the transition to high life expectancies and low birth rates is a long-term transformation of the age structure. Across the world all regions have experienced significant increases in life expectancy since 1950. As life expectancy at birth improves, increased survival at older ages also explains the growing proportion of overall improvement in longevity.

Global statistics indicate that life expectancy at birth has increased from 64.2 years in 1990 to 72.6 years in 2020 and is expected to increase further to 77.1 years in 2050. According to United Nations predictions by 2050, one in six people in the world will be above the age 65 (16%), up from one in 11 in 2019 (9%) (UN Population, 2019). However, as with regional variations in fertility, major differences exist between regions with respect to longevity. Life expectancy at birth in the least developed countries is approximately 7.4 years behind the global average, a fact that can be explained in part due to continuing high child and maternal mortality. Moreover, other societal problems such as violence, wars, epidemics and the continuing effects of HIV contribute to earlier deaths in these areas (UN Population, 2019).

In contrast, predictive models indicate that by 2050 one in four persons living in Europe and Northern America will be over the age of 65. In fact, a milestone in human history was achieved in 2018: for the first time ever, there were more individuals 65 and over than there were children under the age of five. The highest point of the age spectrum is also growing: the 143 million individuals 80 years or over is expected to triple, from 143 million in 2019 to 426 million in 2050 (UN Population, 2019).

Increased longevity is related to gender: life expectancy at birth is estimated to rise globally by about 14.2 years for women and 13.4 years for men (UN Women, 2019). Because women live longer, they make up the greater part of the global population of the elderly. For instance, women aged 60 or older made up 54 percent of the older population in 2017 (UN Women, 2019). Due to predominance of gendered caretaking responsibilities over their life span, older women tend to have more economic, health and social risk factors.

The changing age structures portend to have serious implications for societies and for families. From a macro perspective the potential support ratio of working age individuals aged 25 – 64 to those who are over 65 is decreasing rapidly. The lowest ratio is currently found in Japan at 1.8. 29 other countries most of which are in Europe and the Caribbean, have support ratios that are below three, and 48 countries (primarily high-income countries in North America, Europe and East Asia) are expected to have support ratios under two by 2050 (UN Population, 2019).

The decrease in support ratios could be disastrous for many societies as it places enormous strains on the labor market as well as increasing care responsibilities for families and social protection plans. Health care systems and retirement funds and programs for the elderly will be stretched in many places far beyond what they are currently slated to support. Without enough individuals in the labor market to generate income, it is difficult to predict how these programs will be supported.

### *Demographic Changes and Effects on Families*

In the intimate sphere of families, the decline in fertility rates and the increasing longevity of the elderly will have profound implications. As fewer children are born, families and societies tend to invest more in each child. Formal educational systems continue to increase in importance and families, when they can, are more likely to devote increased resources to each of their children. This is a global phenomenon, specifically in non-agrarian settings (Chi & Qian, 2016).

For individuals who choose not to have children, care in late adulthood may become an increased concern. As the number of elderly increases, and a growing number are less connected with family members due to changing cultural norms around filial duty, childlessness, divorce, separation or remarriage, the need for professional elder care is projected to increase. This phenomenon is also connected to a global expansion of the number of women in the paid labor force whose capabilities to provide care is diminishing. For instance, in China, an increased number of young adults have left their villages seeking work in urban areas consigning “left-behind children” to be cared for by the elderly. However, the increased burden on the elderly who are also expected to be more productive with respect to agrarian outputs, has incited a policy debate about expanding health and educational services and improving infrastructures such as better roads in order to facilitate involving whole households in family decisions that impact their well-being (Chang, Dong, & MacPhail, 2011).

In high-income countries, the focus has shifted to the economic and health care implications of aging populations. In the United States and Europe in particular, concern with caretaking and an aging labor force have dominated political debates. However, very little attention has been paid to the consequences of population aging for social relationships. In other words, how are individuals of varying ages going to interact with one another in families and in the larger society, and whose interests will be represented in social policies and financial arrangements (Hagestad & Uhlenberg, 2007).

A limited number of studies indicate that intergenerational solidarity may actually be increasing in certain places due to financial stressors on young people. As youth employment is more vulnerable under volatile economic conditions, they become more reliant on their parents for financial support (Fingerman & Birditt, 2020). A growing number of young people need family financial support in order to enter the next phases of their lives, such as for educational investments, and / or buying or renting their own homes. Without these supports it becomes very difficult for young people to enter stable long-term relationships and start their own families (Gulbrandsen & Sandlie, 2015). However, as Gulbrandsen and Sandlie suggest, “This may have implications not only for family solidarity as such, how the family distributes its resources among and assures the wellbeing of its members, but also for the broader issues of social policy, social inequality, and social integration” (2015, p. 79). Private intergenerational transfers can lead to increased social inequality, and the family support that individuals receive is becoming an ever-stronger contributing factor to accessing life opportunities. Family solidarity is thus achieved at the price of greater divides within societies.

The lengthening lifespan is clearly influencing family relationships globally with some specific effects in Western countries. The rise in multi-generational living arrangements in the West, is an indicator that family solidarity is not necessarily weakening as is so often suggested in the

literature (Pew, 2018). As states retreat from welfare provisions, and as housing prices increase, the significance of family membership and family support only grows (Fingerman & Birditt, 2020). We thus, have a situation where in many societies today, the strengthening of intergenerational family solidarity co-exists with increased family dissolution due to separation and divorce. From a scholarly and policy perspective, most attention however is directed towards family dissolution. Instead, what is needed is a more focused examination of the factors that strengthen family solidarity including opportunities for the integration and interdependence of youth and the elderly.

The demographic changes discussed above are slow moving, tied to societal values, and thus are unlikely to change radically over the next several decades. The concept of cultural lag portends that it takes an extensive amount of time for new understandings of long-standing institutions to occur (Ogburn, 1957). Thus, it is unlikely that we will see major shifts in attitudes towards long-term relationships and marriage, gender equity, fertility, caretaking, separation and divorce, and other family related phenomena. In addition, as an increasing number of individuals and families migrate (which is discussed in the next section), multicultural aging issues will become a greater concern in societies across the world. This is a significant new development because it affects policies that are being developed to support societies with growing elderly populations. “One size fits all” policy and programming solutions for supporting families are thus not effective options. It is important to be cognizant of the fact that families are dynamic systems and continually adapt to external social, economic, and political circumstances.

#### *Recommendations:*

- Facilitate and emphasize data collection. Data constraints limit policy makers in designing and modifying appropriate programs and policies that can support diverse households and families. Research teams need to formulate methods that encompass both qualitative and quantitative measures that take into consideration gender specific criteria and cultural variations.
- Increase investments in quality early care, as the ability to reconcile labor force participation and childbearing leads to increased fertility for low fertility settings
- Highlight and implement policies that recognize specific gender inequities that make girls and women more economically vulnerable with respect to caretaking and divorce specifically
- Increase investments in youth education and training to enable young people to enter the labor force and to start their own households
- Invest and disseminate information about best practice examples of multigenerational households in varying cultural contexts
- Encourage state supported tax incentives for multi-generational households including health benefits and housing and care supplements
- Expand family life education, including around relationship maintenance and communication, conflict resolution, parenting, and issues of gender equity

## **International Migration and Urbanization**

The acceleration of global integration due to social, economic, political and technological transformations has been accompanied by a variety of social phenomena including increased international migration and a rise in urbanization. Most often these moves are undertaken to improve the economic and social situation of individuals and families (Castels & Miller, 2003). The growth of global corporations and the creation of new free trade zones in particular have encouraged international migration. However, international migration may also be a response to conflict, wars, climate change, and other fraught social conditions and / or perceived opportunities that induce or even force people out of their home regions. Intra-country movements to urban areas are almost always associated with the desire to more easily access better occupational, educational and cultural opportunities. Depending on region, much of this movement is associated with growing inequalities within societies as well as between societies, as individuals and families seek new opportunities and resources. International migration as well as urbanization have profound impacts on family life: individuals leave behind social networks and cultural capital and literally rebuild their lives in new and sometimes completely foreign settings.

### *Who Migrates and to Where?*

While international migration is not a new phenomenon, it has become more common since 1945, and has increased exponentially since the 1980s (Castels & Miller, 2003). According to United Nations estimates, approximately 272 million individuals, or 3.5 percent of the world population were living outside of their native countries as of 2020 (IOM, 2020a). Of those, approximately two-thirds were primarily living in high-income countries in contrast to low-income countries, where about 1.5 percent of the population are not native born. From a global perspective, the United States currently has the highest actual number of immigrants. There are currently 50.7 million foreign born individuals in the United States, constituting about 13.6 percent of the population (UN, 2020). In terms of actual number of immigrants, the United States is followed by Russia, whose high immigration rates, at 11.6 million individuals, are primarily attributed to the fall of the Soviet Union; this event transformed internal migration into international migration (UNECE, 2018). Germany has also become a major receiving society with approximately 12.65 million migrants living there currently. Other countries including Saudi Arabia, France, Canada, Australia, India and Pakistan also receive a high number of migrants ranging from 4 to 7 million individuals each (IOM, 2020a). When compared to their native-born populations, proportionally Middle Eastern countries have the highest number of foreign born. For instance, in the United Arab Emirates, approximately 90 percent of individuals are foreign workers (World Economic Forum, 2017). While several countries such as Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan are sources of migrant labor, the Gulf Oil states are the receivers of this labor.



(World Economic Forum, 2017)

India currently has the largest number of migrants living abroad (17.5 million), followed by Mexico and China (11.8 million and 10.7 million respectively (UN, 2020). The Population Division of the United Nations projects that Belarus, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Japan, the Russian Federation, Serbia and Ukraine will experience a net inflow of migrants over the next decade, to help offset population losses caused by an excess of deaths over births (UN Population, 2019). In 2018, 25.9 million migrants were refugees which is the highest recorded number on record (IOM, 2020a).

Migration is driven by a variety of factors. In high income countries such as the United States job opportunities for instance attract highly educated migrants from India and China. Concurrently, the demand for workers in the Middle East from places such as Bangladesh, Nepal and the Philippines is fueled by the need for low-wage workers. Violence, insecurity and armed conflict has forced individuals and families across the socio-economic spectrum from Syria, Venezuela and Myanmar to seek new international destinations where they are not necessarily received positively (IOM, 2020a; IOM, 2020b).

There is much variation with respect to educational attainment and professional skills amongst international migrants. For example, 60 percent of immigrants to the U.K. are professionals (Migration Observatory, 2019), while Freeman (2006) has estimated that as of 2000, 45 percent of U.S. based Ph.D. economists and 55 percent of U.S. based Ph.D. natural scientists who were younger than 45, were born in other countries. Currently about 25% of all doctors in the United States were born in another country (AIC, 2018). This is at times referred to as the “brain drain” – the emigration of highly skilled workers from the developing world to high-income countries. Some estimates claim that nearly one in ten adults from developing countries with professional degrees in medicine, or who hold PhDs, now live in Europe, Australia, or the United States (Lowell, Findlay & Stewart, 2004; IOM, 2020a). In contrast, many of the immigrants from Mexico to the U.S. had not attained the equivalent of a high school diploma (Pew, 2019).

Many countries, including the United States, also have large illegal immigrant populations (Pew, 2019). Undocumented workers migrate from poorer countries in order to find jobs in agriculture and mining. Estimates hover around the 10.5 million mark for the United States, but credible statistics are missing for both the United States and other countries. Of the estimated 10.5 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S., about 6.2 million are Mexican many of whom are laborers (Pew, 2019).

International migration is closely associated with remittances. According to World Bank statistics, in 2018 remittances to low- and middle-income countries reached an all-time high of \$529 billion and flows to high-income countries reached \$689 billion. India received the highest amount of remittances at 79 billion, followed by China at \$67 billion, Mexico at \$36 billion and the Philippines at \$34 billion. For many low and middle-income countries, remittances make up more than 10 percent of the gross domestic product (MPI, 2019). On a familial or household level, remittances are a primary form of income and provide financial safety nets for members.

### *Gender and Migration*

International migration has become increasingly feminized. While historically, migration was primarily undertaken by men, the last several decades have witnessed a significant shift towards the immigration of women. Currently, almost half of all migrants are female (UNFPA, 2018). The feminization of migration can be closely linked to a demand for female labor brought about through changes in manufacturing, the growth of export processing zones, and an increase in service sector jobs (Castels & Miller, 2003). This demand has encouraged women to seek opportunities for work in higher income regions around the world. Concurrently, other forms of gendered migration have grown as well: specifically, the commercialized movement of domestic workers, the migration and trafficking of women in the sex industry, and the formalized export of girls and women for marriage (mail order brides) (Carling, 2005). Often neglected in studies and analyses of international migration are the differentiated experiences and risk factors that girls and women may face in the new settings – including on the journey itself (UNFPA, 2018). Women may also encounter their own specific social obstacles due to their “traditional” roles as mothers. Women who migrate abroad and send home remittances are often ostracized in their home and host countries as they are perceived as not fulfilling their perceived appropriate gender roles (Parrenas, 2010). This phenomenon which is referred to as “transnational motherhood” has elicited both scholarly and public policy interest as it highlights the highly gendered discourses around economics and familial roles and obligations.

### *Migration Effects and Family Life*

Receiving societies as well as sending societies are impacted by migrants. Depending on socio-historical moment and region, migrants may be welcomed positively (if they bring a desired resource) or they may be regarded with hostility by native born citizens. This can lead to political tensions and restrictive policy responses (Castels & Miller, 2003). Globalization has also transformed the relationship of migrants and those they leave behind. Historically, migration was associated with the loss of familial, community and societal ties. However, through contemporary communication technologies, migrants have many more options for maintaining relationships to their home societies, in contrast to even just several years ago (IOM, 2020a). Ease of travel, combined with media such as the Internet, social media, and video conferencing, allow individuals who leave their homes to stay in touch with loved ones and to retain stronger

cultural ties. Migration also influences gender roles within families. For instance, amongst married couples, in new environments, marital roles marital expectations, and marital satisfaction may be re-evaluated against the norms of the new host society with either beneficial, or at times, very negative effects (for instance a rise in domestic violence) (UN Women, 2019).

Evaluating the effects of migration is complex as multiple factors come into play including the number of migrants that move to a specific location, the tie to the home culture of the immigrants and the access to integration in the host society. The capacity of the host society to assist immigrants with adapting and integrating newcomers is key for a mutually beneficial relationship (IOM, 2020a). Moreover, migration research indicates that integration of migrants throughout the world, tends to happen over successive generations. In addition, marital rates, age at marriage, and fertility rates tend to converge with those of the receiving country, if not immediately, almost always over time (IOM, 2020a; Pew, 2019).

Low birth rates in high income countries coupled with the aging of their populations, enormous inequality and pay differentials between various parts of the world, and increasing ethnic strife guarantee that individuals from low-income regions will continue to want to migrate to other parts of the world and it is widely projected that this phenomenon will grow (IOM, 2020a). There are some clear benefits to this phenomenon. Especially for countries that are experiencing large immigration flows, international migration may slow the ageing process, at least temporarily, since migrants tend to be of young working ages (for instance Germany). However, migrants who remain in the host country eventually age themselves raising questions about nationality and citizenship, benefits, and the appropriate policies that help them integrate in a mutually beneficial and positive manner.

## ***Urbanization***

### *Changing Urban – Rural contexts.*

Approximately half of humanity, 3.5 billion people live in urban areas today. The UNDP (2018) predicts that urban populations are expected to increase by 1.5 billion over the next 20 years, while the number of “megacities” will double. There will be 358 “million cities” with one million or more people, and 27 “mega-cities” of ten million or more. Furthermore, 95 percent of this urban expansion will take place in developing countries. This rapid urbanization is putting pressure on fresh water supplies, sewage, the living environment, and public health. While the world’s cities take up only about three percent of the earth’s landmass, they account for between 60 – 80 percent of energy consumption, and 75 percent of carbon emissions (UNDP, 2018). The centralization of human populations in urban areas creates great challenges – but it also presents opportunities for creating efficiencies with respect to various resources including energy.

### *Urbanization as an Opportunity*

While it is predicted that megacities are expected to grow, most urban residents will live in smaller cities around the globe. One estimate suggests that seventy to eighty percent of India is still going to be built by 2030 (Friedman, 2014). While this phenomenon presents a challenge for our generation, it is also an opportunity to increase efficiencies and to create a model of sustainable human living areas. Given their density, urban areas are ideal places to link

economics and the market place, energy outputs, environmental concerns, and social life. Urbanization is not necessarily a negative phenomenon. If planned and lead correctly, city life can facilitate employment, social life, and sustainability through accessibility and efficiencies. Urban life is a major driver of socio-economic activities and can significantly influence social development. Cities, if well planned, can lead to greater equity, social inclusion and quality of life (UN Habitat, 2016). They facilitate interactions between actors and entities and are catalysts for influencing development agendas at regional, national and international levels. However, poverty still stands as a major determinant of social inclusion and equal participation in urban and rural areas. Study after study highlights the fact that around the world, the poor are excluded from decision making processes and often are marginalized and excluded (DESA, 2009). When the world's most vulnerable citizens are not part of decision-making processes, their needs are not included, and their challenges are unheard and often misunderstood. That makes instituting more participatory processes in urban and rural areas for poverty eradication a top priority.

### *Multi-Dimensional Urbanization*

In Western urban areas the unmarried and the married without children are increasingly an important part of city life. Kotkin and Modarres (2013) raised the question if “childless” cities are really a desirable outcome or ultimately beneficial to contemporary life. While singles and couples without children tend to utilize the advantages of cities (shopping, restaurants, etc.), they tend not to make long term social commitments to the well-being of urban areas. Instead, should they ultimately have children, they often move out towards suburbs or more rural areas. Kotkin and Modarres observed that in the U.S. in major cities, family-friendly neighborhoods have increasingly become areas of well-to-do singles and this has led to significant economic and social consequences (2013). Specifically, young families with children are priced out of urban real estate markets. In fact, the geographer Richard Campanella has termed such areas as “kiddie deserts” (Kotkin & Modarres, 2013). This growth of child-less cities is specifically a Western phenomenon as in most non-Western societies, urban areas are rapidly growing due to family migration from rural areas. This phenomenon is not often recognized and thus, needs more scholarly and policy attention from urban planners and local and state governments.

### *Urban Margins*

In both high-income and low-income countries, regionality plays a critical role in access to resources. Especially, poor people, young children, and the elderly, are frequently disadvantaged if they live far away from centers of power and resources. This is not a topic that is often at the forefront of policy makers agendas as it is extremely difficult to determine the extent to which individuals and families do not have access to services and facilities (DESA, 2009; IOM, 2020a). Due to the effects of climate change, violence and other disasters, migrants from rural areas often settle at the margin of urban centers where they are socially excluded from the social, economic, and political life of cities. These marginal settlements need to be accounted for in the planning and management of today's burgeoning urban environments. Too often, they are subsumed under the term “urbanization” without recognition that within cities, the majority of the population have highly varied experiences. Policies and strategies need to recognize that the lives and access to opportunities of newly arrived migrants differ vastly from those of established urban dwellers.

### *Integrating Gender Equality into Planning and Management of Urban Areas*

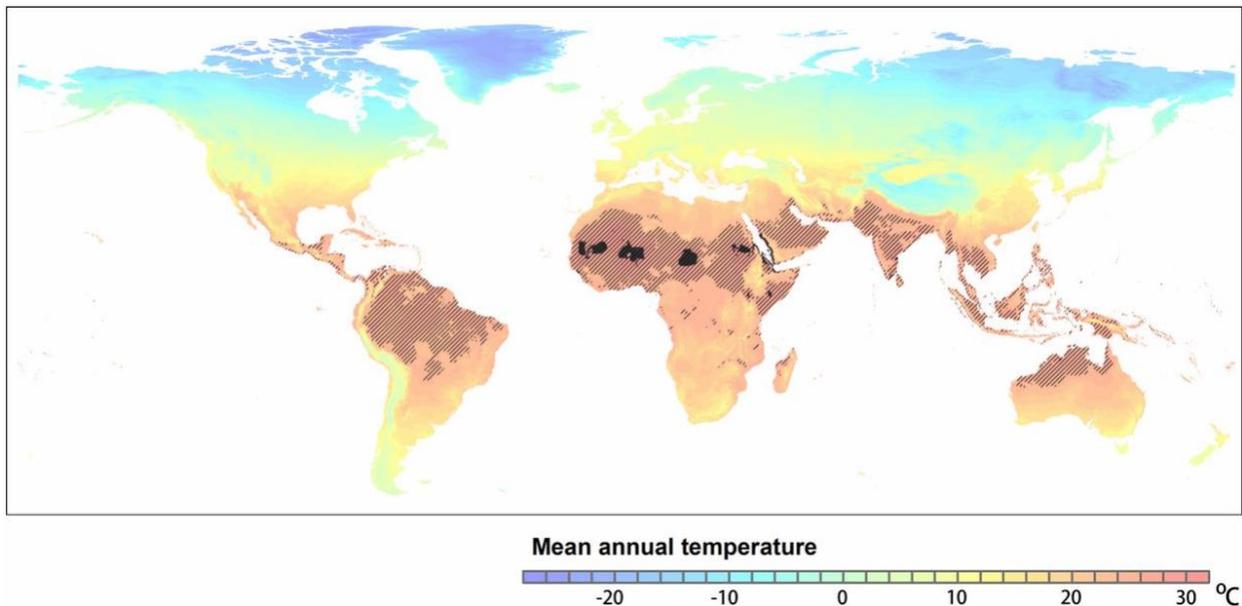
In order for urban areas to be safe, equitable, pleasant places to live, they need to involve the citizenry in their development. Of particular importance is an emphasis on gender equality. Women bear the brunt of inequality in urban contexts if they do not have access to transportation or essential services such as clean water. For instance, if a pregnant woman cannot get to a clinic, she or her baby may suffer a disability or even death (UN Women, 2019). Also, girls and women need to be able to move about with being assaulted or harassed. Unfortunately, sexual violence and sexual harassment in public spaces are extremely common experiences for girls and women (UN Women, 2019). Streets, public transportation, schools, workplaces, water and food distribution sites and parks are all locations that can be dangerous for them. This may reduce girls' and women's freedom of movement and their ability to participate in school, work and public life. Limited mobility also influences access to basic services and can negatively impact girls' and women's health and well-being. While domestic violence is now recognized as a human rights violation, violence and harassment in public spaces remains an issue that has received little if any attention. Thus, it is critical that women participate in every aspect of urban governance, planning and financing, and that gender equality measures are embedded throughout these processes (UN Women, 2019).

### *Recommendations*

- Collect and use disaggregated data as a basis for evidence-based policy making (IOM, 2020a)
- Design mental health services specifically for migrants taking into account cultural and social conditions
- Create services specifically for female migrants including reproductive health care, family planning and prenatal care
- Introduce mobile health clinics for displacement camps and refugee communities
- Create public media campaigns to eliminate all forms of discrimination and promote evidence-based public discourse to shape perceptions of migration
- Invest in skills development and facilitate cross-national recognition of skills, qualifications and competencies of migrants
- Create conditions for migrants to contribute to sustainable development in their host regions and also to learn skills that can be taken back home should that choice arise
- Strengthen international cooperation and global partnerships for safe, orderly and regular migration
- Incorporate recent migrants into urban planning councils to represent their needs
- Instituting more wide-spread participatory processes in urban and rural areas to facilitate poverty eradication
- Adopt a gendered lens when planning on urban areas to create safe conditions for girls and women to live and move around
- Highlight the needs of recent migrants vs. long-established migrants in urban areas and create appropriate programs and policies to facilitate integration

## Climate Change

Climate change is projected to have immense global impacts on individuals and families in the coming decades. As temperatures around the world continue to rise and drought conditions and wildfires spread, households will be impacted specifically with respect to their financial livelihoods. In particular, families who make their living directly off the land will become increasingly vulnerable and may be adversely impacted by climate change. In a very recent study by Chi Xu et al. (2020), the scientists predict that the temperature niche for humans is going to become rapidly hotter in the next fifty years, more than it has over the last 6000 years. Should the populations living in the areas projected to become the hottest not move, one third of all people on earth will experience the extreme heat that is currently only found on 0.8% of the earth's land, much of which is in the Sahara.<sup>4</sup> Climate change is expected to affect every aspect of peoples' lives: health, subsistence, food security, and access to water (Xu et al. 2020). However, because climate change has become a highly politicized topic and its effects are intertwined with many other variables, it is difficult to establish causal links or to make predictions about how populations will react.



(Shaded areas are projected expansion of dark areas) (Chi Xu et al., 2020)

Climate change models indicate that an increase in average global temperatures will concurrently lead to changes in precipitation and atmospheric moisture levels. In certain areas of the world such as Central America, hotter and longer dry seasons are already becoming more common – from three to four months to four – six months – in combination with shorter and drier wet

<sup>4</sup> Chi Xu et al. (2020) predict that about 19% of the global land mass will reach the temperatures currently found in 0.8% of land

season (Baca et al., 2014). Climate change models also indicate that we will see an increase in extreme precipitation, drought and wind, during storms. Many regions of the world will also experience more extreme weather such as hail, drought, hurricanes and extreme cold periods. These changes in climactic conditions are already impacting human populations as they attempt to either adapt to these conditions or migrate to more hospitable climates. Xu et al. (2020) argue that humans need to live in temperate conditions not just because we have depended on agrarian modes of subsistence for much of our settled existence, but also because humans' mental health and mood are affected through climactic conditions such as heat exhaustion. Their work, backed by other large-scale studies, (e.g. Burke et al. 2015), indicate that optimized economic productivity is found in the most temperate areas of the world. Interestingly, this finding encompasses agricultural and nonagricultural activity. This indicator suggests a strong causal link between where human populations live and temperature, and that regional climates either support or constrain human activity.

### *Migration and Climate Change*

Disentangling the role of climate change from other factors which potentially lead to migration, is complicated and still not well understood (Singh & Basu, 2019). Dallman and Millock (2017) pointed out that in order to understand the relationship between migration and climate change, one also needs to take into account local social and economic conditions. They suggested that under certain circumstances, migration will become more likely, while in other contexts, individuals and families will not choose to move since they are not necessarily guaranteed a better level of well-being at their potential destination. For instance, in one recent study, coffee growers indicated that Central American countries will be specifically subject to financial repercussions as land loses climatic suitability for coffee production, and that this phenomenon has begun to result in an out migration of workers (Baca et al, 2014). Specifically, indigenous populations such as those that rely on coffee production in this region of the world are suffering the consequences of climactic changes. As livelihoods become more vulnerable, the food insecurity and subsequent migration of some groups are expected to increase exponentially.

A relatively robust literature indicates that some individuals and families migrate as a response to climate change in their local environments as they are seeking more stable livelihoods. Nevertheless, migration is also associated with the loss of social support networks and volatile, precarious livelihoods in urban areas (Bettini & Gioli, 2016). Migration thus, does not consistently lead to an improvement in family economies. For instance, a study of 14 slums in Bangalore, India indicated that the migrant slum dwellers had not improved their lives from an economic perspective (Krishna et al., 2014). Moving had also not allowed them to create "new identities." Instead, they were relegated to the same social caste they had come from in their villages and were ostracized in their new surroundings (Singh & Basu, 2019).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The increasing occurrence of extreme weather events such as flash floods and cyclones due to global warming are particularly affecting poor households. It is projected that "up to 325 million extremely poor people will be living in the 49 most hazard-prone countries in 2030." The most likely areas are Bangladesh, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, South Sudan, Sudan, and Uganda) which are "at most risk of disaster-induced poverty" by 2030 (Shepherd et al., 2013, p. 1).

### *Specific Gender Effects*

An understudied but critical area of focus is the relationship between extreme weather events and the social implications for girls and women. We now recognize that gender norms and behaviors are interrelated with the other social conditions under which families make decisions about their livelihoods. But what is less understood is that women are at times more vulnerable than men when extreme weather events occur (Ahmed, Haq & Bartiaux, 2019). For instance, impoverished families that live in disaster prone areas face great economic challenges. One coping strategy for these families who have dependent daughters is the early marriage of girls to mitigate further poverty and food shortages that can occur during crisis (Ferdousi, 2014). During times of catastrophe for instance, when families are forced to move to shelters, girls and young women may face the risk of sexual violence in those settings. This leads some families to consider early marriage as the answer to mitigate this problem before it even starts, and also allows for the availability to more food for the other family members (Ahmed, Haq & Bartiaux, 2019). Moreover, in moves from rural areas to urban regions due to climate change, and in those cases where families come from contexts where patriarchal decision making is the norm, girls and women's lives do not necessarily improve. Migration is not consistently associated with a rapid shift to new behaviors or values. Research indicates that gender norms may remain relatively steady or shift only incrementally with new opportunities for girls and women. In those cases where women take on new roles in their new environments - such as supplementing the household income – their agency may increase, albeit very slowly (Singh & Basu, 2019).

What we can learn from the research on climate change and human populations is that instead of putting all of the focus on an imagined “entrepreneurial migrant” seeking to improve their livelihood due to deteriorating regional conditions, efforts need to be extended to retrain local populations to provide them with skills to allow them to stay in their environments. Under certain conditions, migration may be the only available option, however it is not always the most advantageous choice for the affected population.

### *Recommendations:*

- Encourage development programs to take climate change and its impacts on the livelihoods of local populations into account
- Increase investments in irrigation, infrastructures, training for new skill sets to help local populations stay in place despite changes to agricultural lands
- Strengthen social security programs and community-level supports and interventions in order to minimize the reproduction of vulnerabilities within households due to moving
- Highlight gender programs as they are often forgotten in policy decisions on migration; for instance designate separate shelters with protected toilets and bath areas for women and girls so that they are safe
- Provide child care so that adults who have migrated can learn new skills
- Create targeted skill building programs that are suited to varying differential skill sets for individuals who move to urban areas;
- Support programs and policies that take into account the varying populations in urban margins and central urban areas

## Technological Change

Some of the most important changes in families are related to recent technological innovations. For instance, improvements in medical technologies have extended human lifespans, allowed individuals to control their fertility, and decreased the mortality rates of infants and toddlers (OECD, 2011). Concurrently, communication technologies such as the Internet and social media now facilitate staying in continual touch over great distances, and have also introduced people across the globe to new ideas, values and behaviors. Faster and easier travel has also contributed to the spread of new and different beliefs and practices across the globe, and to changes in attitudes and expectations. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of remote working and learning: in a course of several days, a vast number of industries and educational settings went online, and current projections indicate that various businesses will, in all likelihood, continue to function remotely in the future. On the familial level, one benefit of working from home is that families are able to rearrange their chores and caring obligations with greater flexibility (Haskins, Waldfogel & McLanahan, 2011). This allows them to re-negotiate work and home in a manner that has been missing for so many individuals over the last several decades, as work demands have intensified. But bringing work home has also created tension and conflict as working-class and middle-class families in particular have to juggle inadequate resources and supports with a 24/7 expectation to be available to employers (Kulow, 2012). The interactions of individuals and families with technological advancements have, thus, had significant impacts on virtually every aspect of family life, sometimes with very unexpected societal consequences.

### *Medical Technologies*

Improvements in health care, specifically, have had significant consequences for family life. As a result of better diets, living conditions, and medical care, today's elderly adults can expect to live much longer, healthier lives than past generations. Moreover, projections indicate that the life span will continue to be extended as we expand our understandings of the aging process and develop appropriate responses to medical issues. The development of new pharmaceuticals and vaccines, the emergence of regenerative medicine that provides replacement or repair of tissues, and the advances in screenings and management of diseases are all contributing to the healthier aging of human populations. Extending the life span has implications for families: we will see many more "bean pole families" where multiple generations are alive at the same time (Bengtson, 2001). This allows in some cases for stronger bonding and increased intergenerational solidarity or for others, the extension of intergenerational conflicts (Fuller-Iglesias, Webster & Antonucci, 2015). Concurrently, issues of care will become even more complex and crucial as aging adult children may expect to care for their even more elderly parents, and divorce and re-marriage add complex dimensions to these family relationships and perceived obligations (Bengtson, 2001).

Advances in reproductive technologies, especially over the last fifty years, have also played a critical role in transforming aspects of family lives. While an earlier focus in the 1960s and 1970s emphasized controlling fertility through improved contraceptive methods, more recent technological innovations have focused on helping individuals and couples conceive (Inhorn & Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2008). Assisted reproductive technologies have become a multi-billion

dollar global industry that is having profound impacts on how we think about biological kinship, the life span, and familial relationships.

Infertile couples and specifically, women, have been impacted by the enormous advances in assisted reproductive technologies. Particularly in non-Western societies, it is almost always women who have had to bear the physical and medical burdens of infertility, and the subsequent social consequences for their relationships and family life. An emphasis on the importance of children, kinship, old age provision, and the continuation of the family line, has often been translated into blaming women for not being able “to bear children” and, at times, leads to divorce and social exclusion. The burgeoning of assisted reproductive technologies has had an enormous beneficial impact in mitigating some of these effects. Women who have been able to access these technologies, and if they successfully conceive, have been empowered and spared needless gender-based suffering (Inhorn, & Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2008). However, the use of assisted reproductive technologies is also associated with major economic and social class divides and access to resources. For instance, in the United States most state-based insurance plans do not cover the costs of reproductive technologies. Thus, infertile individuals and couples must pay for these exceedingly expensive procedures out of pocket. In several ground-breaking studies on the social implications of these innovative technologies, Marcia Inhorn (2002; 2009) pointed out that assisted reproductive technologies have created elites who have access to these procedures while the poor are depicted as “reproducers” who have too many children. Advances in reproductive technologies have also become a global business: they are increasingly associated with “fertility tourism” where well-to-do couples travel to low-income areas and either purchase the eggs of a poor local woman or hire her as a surrogate to bear their child, for a fraction of the cost compared to in their home locale. This has raised a wide variety of ethical concerns that defy easy solutions as they are embedded in relationships between countries and individuals, and at times conflicting policies and laws. They also lie at the intersection of family life, individual desires, and economic inequalities (Deonandan, Green & Van Beinum, 2012). Reproductive technologies have had another often unrecognized familial effect: they are changing the meaning of middle age. As women are able to have children at increasingly older ages, their life course is changing concurrently (Friese, Becker & Nachtigall, 2008). For older women, especially those who have their first child at the end of their reproductive years, the meanings and identities of middle age have expanded in yet unexplored ways and possibilities.

### *Communication Technologies*

Some of the greatest social change over the last couple of decades has come through the proliferation of communication technologies. The spread of access to the Internet and the introduction and expansion of social media have precipitated a revolution in how individuals communicate and form in person and virtual communities. The advances in communication technologies have revolutionized learning, work, social life, and family relationships within and between families. For instance, Peng and his colleagues (2018) described how through the use of Internet and e-mail adult children and parents can stay in touch through what they call “digital solidarity.” By expanding the use of communicative mechanisms, continuous, regular interactions are facilitated and have enhanced family relationships. By keeping in touch virtually, many elderly people are able to live independently with little or no assistance. Family members or close intimates can help them with issues such as taxes and health care without necessarily being in physical proximity (Peng et. al., 2018). A variety of recent studies have also concluded that the new communication technologies have facilitated the formation of new intimacies

between individuals (for instance assisting individuals find romantic partners), strengthening intergenerational relationships, and increasing general well-being through feelings of connectedness (Amichahi Hamburger & Hayat, 2011; Casimiro & Nico, 2018; Peng et al., 2018). Other studies point out that the new communication technologies have also had detrimental effects on family life and have heightened conflicts, increased destructive and compulsive types of Internet use and raised privacy concerns (Kerkhof et al. 2011; Weinstein et al. 2014). A growing area points to the use of assistive technologies to facilitate the lives of families with children with disabilities (Hook et al., 2014; Parette et al. 2010). Sometimes called family-centered assistive technologies, these are mechanisms that allow families to access information for their particular set of circumstances or they may refer to technologies that enable individuals to make devices that are tailored to meet specific needs. Communication mechanisms that are useful for families with individuals who have disabilities include informational websites, listserves, social networks and blogs. These Internet based communications also allow families to form virtual communities across the world, where they communicate and share resources about their own specific circumstances. Every type of family and every aspect of family life has thus been impacted through innovations in the new communication technologies including but not limited to family communication, family time, school-work-family negotiation, and family conflicts.

The expansion and growth of web-based services and enhanced platforms has also created an immense transition in the work-family arena as well as upending the dichotomy of learning in schools versus at home. For instance, one study has pointed out that as digital technologies become ever more pervasive through the use of smart phones, children and young people are increasingly accessing information outside of school environments (Furlong & Davies, 2012). The traditional nineteenth and twentieth century boundaries between school, home and community are being replaced by fluid flows of information that can be accessed, literally, anywhere individuals have Internet access (Fingerman & Birditt, 2020). The traditional dichotomy between formal and informal learning and where and how it occurs, is breaking down. Unfortunately, we currently have very few if any studies that detail how these changes are impacting and transforming the identity formation process and conceptualizations of the life course among young people in particular (Furlong & Davies, 2012).

One of the most profound impacts of the growth of communication technologies has been felt in the work sphere. As an increased number of individuals are able to perform their job-related duties remotely, this has affected their familial and community relationships (Haskins, Waldfogel & McLanahan, 2011). The physical division between work and family that was introduced through industrialization and continued throughout the twentieth century, has been replaced by a wide variety of virtual employment options, many of which are bringing work back into the home. The work-family boundary is blurring and both positive and negative spillovers from this phenomenon are affecting family life. For instance, Richardson and Thompson (2012) pointed out the continuous use of smart phones in the home and the subsequent lack of detachment from work, interfered with harmonious family life. Recent studies have also shown that smartphones lead to employees feeling pressured to be continually working including in the evenings and on the weekends, leading to emotional exhaustion (Piszczyk, 2016). During COVID-19, as so many jobs have gone virtual, issues of child care, home schooling, productivity while working remotely, and access to technology and the Internet have become part of the

dominant discourse. It remains to be seen when the pandemic finally wanes, if these issues remain on the policy agenda especially in countries like the United States, were efforts towards increasing work place flexibility through remote jobs, providing safety nets for vulnerable populations, and national institutionalized quality child care have not been priorities (Anant & Gassman-Pines, 2020).

The vast improvements in technology have also had macro effects on families, for instance impacting families that migrate. Migrants are now able to access information and advice while in the midst of their travels to their new destination (IOM, 2020a). This includes using apps during forbidden border crossings and connecting with others who can assist them on the migratory journey. However, technological platforms are also allowing migrants to better integrate into their host societies, connect with others from their home regions, send remittances with money apps, and stay in touch with family members over great distances. Thus, families and communities are being re-imagined across time and space in a manner that was unthinkable even just a few years ago. It remains to be seen as we enter the age of artificial intelligence, how family life and family relationships will be impacted by these new types of technologies on both a micro and a macro level.

### *Recommendations*

- Encourage data collection on the varied impacts of the interaction between families and technologies as these are currently very sparse. We need empirical data on reproductive technologies and how they effect family relationships as well as the impacts on family life of communication technologies.
- Fund studies on changing meanings of kinship and family due to advances in assistive reproductive technologies
- Encourage greater global collaborations on setting guidelines around fertility tourism
- Facilitate continued programming for elders on Internet and social media usage as this can facilitate independent living
- Promote stakeholder participation in the formation of effective work-family policies with an emphasis on remote work in order to understand which policies are the most effective for various constituencies and to ensure that the appropriate participants are at the table.
- Build effective partnerships between local businesses and state governments that make them accountable for implementing work-family policies that include low-income and lesser-educated workers as well.
- Create database of examples of policies, programs, and practices that have proven to be successful in various regions as well as effective local initiatives of the use of technology to assist families with members who have a disability, long-term illnesses, and /or elders

### **Conclusion**

This overview of mega-trends and families indicates that the challenge for our world is to develop programs and policies that support individuals and families who live under highly diverse conditions, and yet are faced with rapid changes in every aspect of their lives. Technology in particular is creating new opportunities, and simultaneously transformations, that are developing at lightning speed. Yet, empirical research on these trends, and appropriate

programs and policies that support individuals and families, tend to lag behind. Thus, we do not always understand how families interact with the varying shifts in their environments (Fingerman & Birditt, 2020). In most places, family policies and programs were developed at a time when families looked less complex than they do today. Thus, there is a critical need for appropriate programs and policies that are responsive to key social and family conditions under various dynamic conditions. What we can currently say, however, is that as families have changed, they have not declined in importance. For instance, longer life spans have translated into an increase in the relevance of multi-generational bonds (Fingerman & Birditt, 2020). These bonds provide an important resource for families as they allow for increased family solidarity if appropriate supports are in place. Moreover, lessening state support for social services in many parts of the world is creating an environment in which families are more, not less important to the health and well-being of individuals, especially children, the terminally ill, individuals with disabilities, and the elderly (Trask, 2010; Trask, 2014). We have certainly witnessed this during the global COVID-19 pandemic. Responsive programs and policies that strengthen and support families reduce the risks that are brought about by these kinds of crises as well as demographic shifts, migration, urbanization, climate change, and technology. A systemic perspective that highlights how various factors and trends intersect and interact with one another is key to creating appropriate responses. This systemic approach needs to be at the top of states' agendas in order to accomplish the 2030 Agenda and ensure that the Sustainable Development Goals are met. We know that strengthening family supports leads to improvements in the social and economic capital of individuals and concurrently, the well-being of individuals and communities. It is only through such a coordinated response that we can reach the most vulnerable, individuals world-wide and assist them in realizing their rights, capabilities, and full potential.

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