

**General Assembly
Economic and Social Council**Distr.: General
11 November 2011

Original: English

**General Assembly
Sixty-seventh session
Social development: social development, including
questions relating to the world social situation and to
youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family****Economic and Social Council
Substantive session of 2012
Social and human rights questions:
social development****Preparations for and observance of the twentieth
anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2014****Report of the Secretary-General***Summary*

The present report is submitted in response to Economic and Social Council resolution 2011/29 of 28 July 2011. The report recommends that preparations for the observance in 2014 of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family focus on developing and implementing policies in the following areas: confronting family poverty and social exclusion; ensuring work-family balance; and advancing social integration and intergenerational solidarity. At the international level, the report recommends the sharing of good practices and data on family policy development.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report has been prepared pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 2011/29 of 28 July 2011, in which the Council requested the Secretary-General to submit a report to the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session, through the Commission for Social Development and the Economic and Social Council, on the implementation of that resolution, including a description of the state of preparation for the observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family at all levels.

2. In the above-mentioned resolution, the Council urged Member States to view 2014 as a target year by which concrete efforts would be taken to improve family well-being through the implementation of effective national policies, strategies and programmes. It encouraged them to continue their efforts to develop appropriate policies to address family poverty, social exclusion and work-family balance. The Council also requested the Commission for Social Development to consider the following themes to guide the preparations for the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family:

- (a) Poverty eradication: confronting family poverty and social exclusion;
- (b) Full employment and decent work: ensuring work-family balance;
- (c) Social integration: advancing social integration and intergenerational solidarity.

3. The present report focuses on family policy development in the areas of the three proposed themes for the observance of the anniversary: family poverty, work-family balance and intergenerational issues. The report also describes the state of preparations for the observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family at the national, regional and international levels, including civil society initiatives.

II. Family policy development and implementation

4. Families are the basic building blocks of a society. The international community proclaimed 1994 as the International Year of the Family in recognition of the numerous contributions made by families to overall development efforts. The objectives of the Year and its follow-up processes aim at responding to challenges faced by families and continuing to guide national efforts that benefit families worldwide. The upcoming twentieth anniversary of the International Year offers an opportunity to focus on family-oriented policy frameworks capable of responding to new challenges faced by families since 1994, as outlined in the previous report of the Secretary-General (A/66/62-E/2011/4). This is particularly important in the light of the adverse impacts of the ongoing social crisis resulting from the impact of the global economic crisis on families.

5. In Economic and Social Council resolution 2011/29, Member States recognized that the preparations for and observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family provide a useful opportunity for drawing further attention to the objectives of the Year for increasing cooperation at all levels on family issues and for undertaking concerted actions to strengthen family-centred policies and programmes as part of an integrated comprehensive approach to development.

6. It is generally agreed that families deserve to be the focus of policymaking, owing to the critical contributions they make to society. Families bear the primary responsibility for the socialization of children and the development of their social skills, which are vital skills in all aspects of adult life: economic, social, public and personal. Research suggests that parenting plays a significant role in children's success in school, hence contributing to the development of a society's human capital.¹ Families also support adult children well beyond their school years, allowing young adults to gain the experience, credentials and social competencies required to pursue their careers in the competitive economies of today.

7. Despite their obvious social and economic contribution to society, families are rarely the focus of major policy initiatives. Often, such policies target women and children separately, and not the family unit per se. Although some regional and national efforts in developing family-oriented policies have been made, they have not been the subject of much research or documentation, particularly in developing countries. Research on both the way in which family policy priorities are set, and how families are affected by such policies, has been limited. Systematic research on families remains largely limited to developed countries, in significant part owing to the work of the secretariat of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

8. Besides the scarcity of financial resources, many Governments face challenges in the design and implementation of family policies, owing to the lack of national expertise and capacity. As an additional challenge, a growing number of societies are experiencing rapidly changing family forms, functions and size.

9. The continuing negative consequences of the economic and social crisis pose numerous challenges for families. In developing and developed countries alike, falling family incomes force parents to make cuts in health and education expenditures for their children. Once taken out of schools, children are unlikely to return and their educational attainment, productivity and future income prospects are greatly diminished.² Economic stress also jeopardizes family cohesion and has been linked to increased domestic violence and divorce rates, as well as to the neglect and abuse of children. There is a growing concern that economic stability measures, including reductions in social spending undertaken to counteract the current crisis, may further negatively affect families worldwide.

10. In times of increased vulnerability and uncertainty, the importance of families' economic and social functions becomes more visible. The ability of families to fulfil those functions, however, is put into question as families find it increasingly more difficult to care for household members young and old, reconcile work and family life and maintain the intergenerational bonds that sustained them in the past. The upcoming twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, therefore, is an opportunity to review challenges faced by families and reflect on how best to support them in fulfilling their economic and nurturing roles that are so important for stable and cohesive societies.

¹ Karen Bogenschneider and Thomas J. Corbett, "Family policy: becoming a field of inquiry and subfield of social policy", *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 72, No. 3 (June 2010), pp. 783-803.

² *The Global Social Crisis: Report on the World Social Situation 2011* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.10.IV.12).

11. At the core of the ability of the family to provide economically and emotionally for its members and thus contribute to the well-being of society lie poverty reduction, work-family balance and intergenerational solidarity.

A. Anti-poverty policies focusing on families

12. Previous reports of the Secretary-General on family issues (including A/64/134 and A/66/62-E/2011/4) have emphasized the relevance of focusing on families in overall poverty eradication efforts. The reports have also noted that special policy frameworks are needed for the families most at risk of poverty and social exclusion, such as single-parent or large families, indigenous families, or families who care for household members with disabilities. Family-focused social transfer programmes, including conditional and unconditional cash transfers, have been found to be effective in shielding families from the negative effects of economic shocks, reducing vulnerabilities and improving child nutrition and school attendance, as well as reducing child labour, thus helping to prevent the intergenerational transfer of poverty.

13. A number of countries have passed legislation that gradually institutionalizes such programmes and makes Government agencies responsible for their delivery. In southern Africa, non-contributory pensions for older persons have proved an effective policy response, both to poverty risks and the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Support for older persons taking care of other family members, in the absence of working-age family members, is especially important. Various evaluations of social pensions in southern Africa have also demonstrated their positive impact on nutrition and poverty reduction, particularly among extended families. Non-contributory pensions in South Africa reduced overall poverty by 21 per cent, with a reduction of 54 per cent in families with older persons. In Lesotho, as a result of pensions, hunger rates have been cut in half. In Mauritius, the provision of non-contributory pensions reduced the rate of poverty in households with older persons from 64 per cent to 19 per cent. Overall, regular pension income provides income security for families so that they can better cope with risk and uncertainty or invest in higher-return activities, such as in Namibia, where some older persons use their pensions to invest in livestock and agricultural activities and to access credit.³

14. In contrast to southern Africa, in such countries as Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar and Zambia, cash transfer programmes remain mostly project-based and are typically delivered by donor agencies.³ The lack of domestic ownership and resources is a serious obstacle to the long-term sustainability of such schemes.

15. In Latin America, impact evaluations of family-oriented cash transfer programmes have shown positive outcomes in children's education, health and nutrition. Large-scale programmes have also contributed to inequality reduction and have had some impact on narrowing the poverty gap and lessening the severity of poverty. Often, family-oriented anti-poverty programmes are designed with a traditional family model in mind, consisting of a husband breadwinner and a stay-at-

³ Zitha Mokomane, "Anti-poverty policies focusing on families: regional overview: Africa", paper prepared for the expert group meeting on "Assessing family policies", held from 1 to 3 June 2011 in New York. Materials from the meeting are available from: <http://social.un.org/index/Family/MeetingsEvents/EGMonAssessingFamilyPolicies.aspx>.

home wife. Such models, however, corresponded to only 20 per cent of the total number of households in Latin America in 2005.⁴

16. In Asia, there have been a few documented attempts to introduce cash transfers for families. In China, the “Minimum living standard assurance” programme (*di bao*), which started in Shanghai in 1993 and gradually expanded to other cities and rural areas, provides a basic cash benefit to low-income families. It has been credited with lowering the poverty rate of its beneficiaries by 16 per cent, narrowing the poverty gap by 29 per cent, and lessening the severity of poverty by 38 per cent.⁵ In the Philippines, a pilot conditional cash transfer programme is currently being implemented. In a few countries, programmes were launched but discontinued owing to difficulties in programme administration. In-kind transfers, however, including food subsidies and school meals, are more widely used to help families in need, while public works programmes and supplementary employment opportunities for the rural poor are often considered a more effective and sustainable way to reduce family poverty.

17. Most cash-transfer provisions aimed at reducing child poverty are based on the premise that poverty experienced in early childhood has a significant impact on a child’s behavioural and cognitive development, as well as on adult working and earning capacity later in life. Child poverty may be considered as beginning in the womb, since poverty experienced by pregnant mothers has been linked to the life chances of their children and grandchildren. As a result, policies often focus on improving the nutrition and well-being of mothers.

18. Gender discrimination within families and communities continues to be a major obstacle to poverty eradication. Girls are often denied access to education and carry out a disproportionate burden of domestic work compared with boys. Later in life, disparate levels of education between men and women tend to reinforce gender inequalities, limit women’s opportunities to find gainful employment and result in unequal decision-making power in households. To reduce gender disparities in access to education, cash transfers are sometimes offered for families to enrol girls in schools. In Cambodia, the enrolment and attendance of girls at the participating schools increased by around 30 per cent when families received conditional cash transfers linked to girls’ attendance and school performance.⁶ In Bangladesh, Pakistan and Turkey, conditional cash transfers have also helped to reduce gender gaps in school enrolment for girls. A cash transfer programme in Pakistan increased the number of 10- to 14-year-old girls in school by 11 per cent.⁷

19. Parental unemployment continues to be the highest risk factor for family poverty in OECD countries, where jobless poverty rates are 3 to 5 times higher than

⁴ Irma Arriagada, “Family and cash transfer programmes in Latin America”, paper prepared for the expert group meeting on “Assessing family policies”.

⁵ Bjorn Gustafsson and Deng Quheng, “Di Bao receipt and its importance for combating poverty in urban China”, *Poverty & Public Policy*, vol. 3, No. 1 (2011), quoted in Qin Gao, “Anti-poverty family policies in China: a critical evaluation”, paper prepared for the expert group meeting on “Assessing family policies”.

⁶ Deon Filmer and Norbert Schady, “Getting girls into school: evidence from a scholarship program in Cambodia”, Policy Research Working Paper, No. 3910, (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2006).

⁷ Ariel Fiszbein and Norbert Schady, *Conditional Cash Transfers: Reducing Present and Future Poverty* (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2009).

in-work poverty rates.⁸ Against this background, cash transfers and tax benefits contribute to cutting poverty rates by almost half in the OECD area.⁸ Yet the strongest improvement in the living conditions of families with children is reported in countries that also have provisions for services such as childcare, travel, food and housing subsidies.⁸

20. The global financial and economic crisis has generated new impediments to a number of social programmes that have a direct bearing on the welfare of families. Governments have introduced both stimulus and austerity measures, which involve changes to family cash benefits and childcare, including freezing child benefits, restrictions on coverage, cuts to baby grants, reductions in formal childcare support, as well as cuts in parental leave and housing benefits.⁸

B. Work-family balance policies

21. Work-family balance policies aim to support working parents in being productive individuals while ensuring the physical and emotional well-being of their children. As noted in previous reports of the Secretary-General on family issues, parental leave, flexible working arrangements and childcare services are considered most important to ensuring work-family balance.

22. The legal framework for work-family balance has been defined by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in its Convention concerning Equal Opportunities and Equal Treatment for Men and Women Workers: Workers with Family Responsibilities (Convention No. 156), which stipulates that in order to create effective equality and opportunity of treatment for men and women workers, persons with family responsibilities who are engaged in, or wish to engage in employment should be able to do so without being subject to discrimination. The Convention was adopted in 1981, with a view to creating effective equality of opportunity and treatment for men and women workers. The ILO Convention concerning the revision of the Maternity Protection Convention (Revised) (Convention No. 183), which was adopted in 2000, strengthens protection in the areas of health protection, maternity leave, employment protection and the provision of benefits. As of October 2011, the conventions had been ratified by 41 and 22 countries, respectively.⁹

23. Nearly all countries have adopted legislative provisions concerning maternity protection at work. Many countries which are not parties to ILO Convention No. 183 adhere to several key aspects of that Convention, with 85 countries providing a statutory minimum of 14 weeks of maternity leave. Maternity protection standards have been improving over time, with more countries providing benefits to mothers following the birth of a child. Still, in many countries, maternity protection is not afforded to agricultural and domestic workers.¹⁰ Moreover, employers are

⁸ Dominic Richardson, "Family policies and poverty reduction in OECD countries", paper prepared for the expert group meeting on "Assessing family policies".

⁹ According to the International Labour Organization Database of International Labour Standards (ILOLEX), accessed on 5 October 2011, available from: www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/newratframeE.htm.

¹⁰ International Labour Organization, *Maternity at work: a review of national legislation. Findings from the ILO Database of Conditions of Work and Employment Laws*, 2nd ed. (ILO, Geneva, 2010).

often fearful of the potential absenteeism and lower productivity of workers with parental responsibilities, and tend to refrain from financing maternity leave.

24. In developing countries, the reconciliation of work and family life policies competes with a large number of development priorities. Although most developing countries have statutory maternity leave, the entitlements are usually limited. In Asia, the maternity leave benefits offered by employers range from 52 days in Nepal to around 180 days in Viet Nam. Compliance with maternity leave regulations, however, is often problematic and many women do not avail themselves of the full benefits, for fear of losing their jobs. Even though paternity leave is relatively short throughout the region, ranging from 3 to 15 days, men, similarly to women, believe that they are risking job security by availing themselves of this entitlement.

25. In the developing world, most men and women work in the informal sector, where social protection remains the exception and work-family balance arrangements are not provided. Even in the formal sector, long working hours are the norm and flexible working arrangements are rarely offered. More informal arrangements are sometimes in place, however, where permission is granted to leave the workplace for family reasons. Childcare arrangements to facilitate parental participation in the labour force are scarce in developing countries, with extended families providing the bulk of care for young children.

26. In the majority of developed countries, maternity and paternity leave arrangements are well established, with varying emphasis on contributing to children's well-being, increasing gender equality and balancing work and family life. However, there is a growing recognition that these goals are interrelated. In addition to parental leave, other major work-family balance policies in both the public and private sectors encompass incentives to facilitate part-time work, flexible working arrangements and telecommuting.

27. In Eastern Europe, while maternity leave is usually generous, paternity leave has only recently started to be introduced in the region, and, in some countries, is still shorter than the two weeks recommended by the European Union, ranging from 5 days in Hungary and Poland to 15 days in Bulgaria.¹¹ In Slovenia, the Parenthood Protection and Family Benefits Act (2006) offers 105 days of maternity leave and 260 days of parental leave, both with full salary.

28. Childcare provision and subsidies for private childcare arrangements are considered a vital part of work-family balance in developed countries. A new trend in some countries is to offer financial compensation to family members, especially grandparents, who care for children. In Hungary, for example, a child home-care allowance is offered to parents and grandparents caring for children under the age of 2. Such a scheme reduces the cost of childcare for both the State and the family and fosters intergenerational solidarity.

29. Father-sensitive work-family leave is gradually becoming part of the work-family balance in several developed countries. According to the database of the Harvard University and McGill University joint project on Global Working Families, paid statutory entitlement to paternity leave or paid parental leave is available in 66 countries, whereas paid maternity leave is provided in 169 countries.

¹¹ Mihaela Robila, "Assessing family policies around the world: a focus on Eastern Europe", paper prepared for the United Nations expert group meeting on "Assessing family policies".

Benefits vary in length, payment and flexibility, and whether it is an individual or family entitlement. In several countries, so-called father enhancement schemes use incentives, compulsion or penalties.¹²

C. Intergenerational solidarity initiatives

30. As noted in recent reports of the Secretary-General on family issues, initiatives aimed at promoting intergenerational solidarity and cooperation encompass social protection schemes, youth and older persons volunteer programmes, investing in cross-generational community centres and promoting intergenerational communication at work through job-sharing and mentoring programmes.

31. Social protection programmes, such as pension schemes, have been found to increase older persons' status within their families and to be conducive to intergenerational solidarity. In southern Africa, older persons often use the benefits they receive to help offset the cost of child education and health care. Girls in households in receipt of grants, in particular, are more likely to attend school and succeed academically and have better health and nutrition indicators than children in households without grants. Pensions have also been linked to reductions in child labour and are sometimes used by older family members to support the participation of adult family members in labour markets, through investments in livestock or as collateral for credit (see also para. 13 above).

32. Youth-led volunteer initiatives often provide services to older persons, such as home visits to lonely or home-bound elderly persons and assistance with household tasks. Volunteer programmes for older persons, such as the "Retired senior volunteer programme" in Singapore, provide mentoring programmes for young children as part of afterschool activities and host programmes for young international students. The "Swedish granddad programme" offers salaries to grandfathers working full-time at schools.

33. In the United States of America, the Experience Corps engages people aged 55 and over in improving children's early reading and literacy skills. The programme recruits older persons to tutor and mentor elementary school students, help teachers in the classrooms and lead afterschool activities. It has been found to boost student performance and improve the well-being of older adults.¹³ Through the Older Americans Act, resources are provided for intergenerational programmes for older volunteers and for services facilitating interaction between older persons and school-age children.

34. Sharing of intergenerational cultural heritage is the focus of the "National oral history programme" in South Africa. Launched in 2006, the project compiles stories of older persons who took part in key recent national historic events. The draft national policy on South African living heritage, of 2009, and an intergenerational

¹² Margaret O'Brien, "Father-inclusive family policies: challenges and recommendations", paper prepared for the United Nations expert group meeting on "Assessing family policies".

¹³ Donna M. Butts, "Existing frameworks for dialogue and mutual understanding across generations; family, community, educational institutions and workplace", paper prepared for the expert group meeting on "Dialogue and mutual understanding across generations", held on 8 and 9 March 2011 in Doha. Materials from the meeting are available from: <http://social.un.org/index/Family/MeetingsEvents/DialogueandMutualUnderstanding.aspx>.

dialogue programme, launched in 2010, also aim to promote intergenerational solidarity.

35. Community centres, such as age-integrated facilities for children and older persons, help to bring young and old persons closer, facilitating their daily interaction. Family centres in Singapore place childcare, afterschool care and day-care service for the elderly in close proximity, to facilitate intergenerational interaction.¹⁴ The sharing of public facilities and spaces, such as schools, youth or active ageing centres, is also used to promote opportunities for formal and informal dialogue across generations. In a few countries, countrywide intergenerational centres or networks, such as the Centre for Intergenerational Practice in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, or Generations United in the United States, actively promote intergenerational strategies, programmes and public policies.¹³

36. At a regional level, the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations in 2012 is being organized by the European Commission, while 29 April marks the annual observance of the European Day of Solidarity between Generations.

III. Preparations for and observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family

A. Initiatives at the national and regional levels*

37. In Colombia, the implementation of family policies focusing on combating poverty and social exclusion and promoting social integration and intergenerational solidarity forms an integral part of national preparations for the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family. The cash transfer programme “Familias en acción” targets children’s health and education; the “Escuelas para las familias” programme supports relationship and parenting education, while the “Haz paz” programme aims at preventing domestic violence.

38. In Greece, family policy priorities go to the protection of mother and child, older persons and large families. An electronic system of social aid services has been developed, under the auspices of the National Centre for Social Solidarity, to enhance the coordination of social protection provisions. The Centre also coordinates and implements social solidarity and volunteer programmes to fight social exclusion. Improvements are being made in counselling services for family members affected by domestic violence, and in facilitating adoption procedures.

39. The Holy See acts in favour of the family through the Pontifical Council for the Family, whose major pastoral initiative will be the Seventh World Meeting of Families, to be held from 30 May to 3 June 2012 in Milan, Italy, under the theme: “Work and celebration”. The event is to focus attention on the family as the original nucleus of society and the foundation of social ties.

¹⁴ Leng Leng Thang, “Promoting intergenerational understanding between the young and old: the case of Singapore”, paper prepared for the expert group meeting on “Dialogue and mutual understanding across generations”.

* The information in paragraphs 37 to 46 is based on responses to the note verbale sent by the Secretariat in August 2011.

40. In Indonesia, the implementation of national policies on the family is the responsibility of the National Family Planning Coordinating Board. National family resilience programmes are implemented to help families with young children acquire the necessary parenting skills to ensure child development; families with adolescents to improve family communication; and families with older persons by promoting their active participation in family life. Public awareness of the role of the family is raised through annual observance of National Family Day (29 June).

41. In 2010, Japan revised its childcare and family law to facilitate the balance between work and childcare for men and women. The revised law obliges employers to take measures to establish a shorter working hour system for employees caring for children under the age of 3, and a system of exemption from overtime work upon request. It also extends the duration of parental leave and facilitates paternal leave arrangements.

42. In Jordan, the National Council for Family Affairs focuses on family policies and legislation as well as protection of the family against all types of violence, including domestic violence. It also carries out socio-economic, educational, cultural, health and environment programmes benefiting families. The Council works towards establishing frameworks for coordination and networking among institutions working on family issues at the local, regional and international levels and aims to strengthen the participation of non-governmental organizations in the adoption of policies and development strategies.

43. In Peru, the Ministry of Women and Social Development formulates, coordinates and implements policies aimed at strengthening families, in accordance with the national plan of support for the family, 2004-2011. The Ministry's Department of the Family and Community and its legal and technical branch, the Department of Assistance and Strengthening of the Family, have promoted the enactment of legislation to strengthen the family's capacity to carry out its nurturing, formative, socialization and economic protection functions. The fourth national convention on families, on the theme "Family and work: strengthening of inter-family relations with State, private sector and social responsibility" took place in May 2011, and awareness-raising activities were undertaken in observance of the International Day of Families. In preparation for the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, the following activities at the national level were recommended for consideration: national conventions on families; competition on good practices in family policymaking; information campaigns on the importance of strengthening families; national plans for strengthening families for the period 2012-2021 (with systems of monitoring and evaluation); establishment of national family observatories; drafting of legal frameworks to reinforce family functioning; eradication of poverty in urban and rural families; reduction of inequalities; and work-family balance and related topics.

44. In Uruguay, efforts to improve the situation of vulnerable children, young people and their families are being led by the Department for Children, Adolescents and the Family. The "Estimulación oportuna" programme has increased the provision of nutrition and specialized care to pregnant women and young children. The "Maestros comunitarios" programme works closely with families and communities to develop human capital through reducing school absenteeism. Several mechanisms (information systems pertaining to childhood and adolescence

and a centralized register of beneficiaries) were created or strengthened to evaluate the impact of social programmes on individuals and their families.

45. The Fourth East Asia Ministerial Forum on Families, hosted by Malaysia from 7 to 10 November 2010, considered shared experiences and best practices in intervention and rehabilitation programmes among at-risk and high-risk families, such as those affected by HIV/AIDS, poverty, domestic violence, divorce and single-parent families. The ministers and heads of delegations from 14 countries of the subregion resolved to enhance collaboration in the sharing of information on family policies, data, research and best practices, and in capacity-building to address common family issues.¹⁵

46. The first regional preparatory conference for the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, organized by the European Parliament, was held on 29 June 2011. The meeting focused on the theme “Intergenerational solidarity: concept, rights and responsibilities” and gathered representatives from 32 countries, as well as Members of the European Parliament from various political groups.

B. Civil society initiatives

47. The New York Non-governmental Organization Committee on the Family raised awareness about the objectives of the International Year of the Family and its twentieth anniversary through monthly meetings on a variety of family-related issues, including the effects of globalization on the family, parenting challenges and solutions and United Nations and non-governmental organization collaboration on family issues.

48. The Vienna Non-governmental Organization Committee on the Family has begun efforts to build awareness of the observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family through its quarterly bulletin, “Families International”, which is published online.¹⁶ The Vienna Committee held an International Forum on 16 May 2011 at the Vienna International Centre to observe the International Day of Families and put forward a proposal to carry out an update of its study, entitled “Documenting contributions of civil society organizations to the well-being of families”, carried out in 2004.

49. The Focal Point on the Family in the Division for Social Policy and Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs held consultative meetings with the following non-governmental organizations concerning the preparations for the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family: the Doha International Institute for Family Studies and Development; Foro de la familia (Spain); The Family Watch; Family Watch International; Generations United; the national organization for free choice in childcare, equality and parenthood with the child in focus (HARO, Sweden); the Howard Center for Family, Religion and Society; the International Federation for Family Development, the International Federation for Parent Education; the National Council on Family Relations (United States); the New York Non-governmental Organization Committee on the Family; Parents Forum; Reach the Children; the Service and

¹⁵ See the “Kuala Lumpur statement on protecting and empowering at-risk and high-risk families”, available from <http://202.187.17.12/~kpwkm/eastasia/images/klstatement.pdf>.

¹⁶ Available from www.viennafamilycommittee.org/.

Research Institute on Family and Children; United Families International; the Universal Peace Federation; the Vienna Non-governmental Organization Committee on the Family; the World Family Organization; Mouvement mondial des mères (the World Movement of Mothers, France); the Worldwide Organization for Women and others. Many civil society organizations offered their support for the preparations and are planning national and regional events leading to the observance of the International Year.

50. The Doha International Institute for Family Studies and Development has offered to work with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, civil society and other partners to organize a series of regional expert group meetings to examine themes related to the objectives of the International Year of the Family and its twentieth anniversary.

C. Preparations at the international level

1. Commission for Social Development

51. The follow-up to the International Year of the Family is an integral part of the agenda and of the multi-year programme of work of the Commission for Social Development. Pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 2011/29, the Commission is to review, annually until 2014, the preparations for the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family.

52. During the deliberations of the Commission at its forty-ninth session, various Member States stressed the importance of integrating family perspectives into overall social policymaking and broader socio-economic strategies. Governments were encouraged to ensure the implementation of the objectives of the International Year of the Family, in line with the upcoming twentieth anniversary, by helping to ensure further promotion and realization of its mandated objectives. Delegates noted that the institution of the family was being challenged by the adverse affects of the current financial and economic crisis and the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and needed protection. The exchange of good practices in family policies and programmes was also recommended.

2. Department of Economic and Social Affairs

53. In 2011, the Division for Social Policy and Development organized two expert group meetings in preparation for the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family. Social integration and intergenerational solidarity issues, with a special emphasis on youth, were the topics of the expert group meeting on “Dialogue and mutual understanding across generations” convened in Doha, on 8 and 9 March 2011. The meeting was organized in cooperation with the Doha International Institute for Family Studies and Development,¹⁷ and was convened in observance of the International Year of Youth, 2010-2011, and as part of the preparations for the twentieth anniversary of the International Year.

¹⁷ Materials from the expert group meeting on “Dialogue and mutual understanding across generations”, held on 8 and 9 March 2011 in Doha, are available from: <http://social.un.org/index/Family/MeetingsEvents/DialogueandMutualUnderstanding.aspx>.

54. 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 to 3 June 2011. The experts discussed current trends affecting families and the need for policy responses. They focused on family policy assessment and made a regional review of family policies in the areas of poverty eradication and work-family balance.¹⁸

55. At a side event of the forty-ninth session of the Commission for Social Development, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs launched a new publication entitled *Men in Families and Family Policy in a Changing World*.¹⁹ The publication emphasizes the importance of policies facilitating greater involvement of men in the lives of their families, in particular in the area of work-life balance. Measures that prove effective to that end include expanding paternity leave; offering flexible working arrangements for men and women with small children, such as an option to work part-time; and expanding access to childcare. Family laws may also need revision to recognize men as caregivers and allow for joint custody in cases of divorce. Policies should also support men’s and women’s joint control of household assets and joint household decision-making to guarantee adequate livelihoods for their families.

56. In 2011, a panel discussion was organized for the International Day of Families, under the theme for the observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year: “Confronting family poverty and social exclusion”, at United Nations Headquarters. Panellists included representatives of the Permanent Mission of Mexico to the United Nations, the United Nations Children’s Fund, OECD and civil society. Speakers noted that cash transfer programmes in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America had been effective in improving a number of beneficiary welfare indicators, such as overall health, nutrition and school attendance. The panel emphasized that children in sole-parent households are more likely to be living in poverty, and that focusing on children is indispensable for preventing an intergenerational transfer of poverty. Addressing social exclusion stemming from discrimination, prejudice, abuse, lack of voice and powerlessness is also important if anti-poverty policies are to succeed. The panel concluded that fighting family poverty would help address a range of other issues, such as mobilizing labour supply, promoting gender equity and enhancing child well-being and development.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

57. The forthcoming anniversary, in 2014, of the International Year of the Family, offers an opportunity to revisit family-oriented policies as part of overall development efforts. Even though it would be misleading to argue that family factors affect all social issues, or that family approaches are always effective, family-focused policies have proven both valuable and efficient in many areas of social development.

¹⁸ Materials from the expert group meeting on “Assessing family policies”, held from 1 to 3 June 2011 in New York, are available from: <http://social.un.org/index/Family/MeetingsEvents/EGMonAssessingFamilyPolicies.aspx>.

¹⁹ *Men in Families and Family Policy in a Changing World* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.11.IV.1), New York, 2011.

58. In the area of poverty eradication, family-focused programmes have been found to be effective in reducing overall rates of poverty, and should be continued and expanded. Confronting poverty requires a clear recognition that adequate and sustainable family support programmes are indispensable tools for promoting children's development, reducing family poverty and preventing intergenerational transfers of poverty. Anti-poverty strategies, such as cash transfers, tax benefits, the provision of basic services and other measures, should take into account both the diversity of needs of family members and respect for gender equality. Special assistance is needed for young couples starting families, through tax breaks, preferential loans and housing assistance. In the light of the persistent negative effects of the economic and financial crisis, special measures are needed to protect the most vulnerable families.

59. Ensuring work-family balance rests on providing incentives and removing existing regulatory obstacles that prevent the business sector from establishing parental leave; introducing flexible working arrangements and part-time job opportunities; and finding other creative ways to increase work flexibility and productivity.

60. Quality childcare is indispensable to optimal work-family balance. Parents should have a variety of options at their disposal, including public or employer-provided childcare, stay-at-home care, extended family support or other arrangements according to their children's individual needs. While subsidies are often provided for external childcare services, only very rarely are financial incentives offered to family caregivers. Parental choices should be supported and financial subsidies offered for different forms of childcare, according to parental preference.

61. As work-family balance policies are key to helping achieve a fairer distribution of household duties and childcare responsibilities, thus contributing to gender equality, family policies should turn towards a dual-earner family model supporting both men's and women's caring and earning responsibilities. Father-inclusiveness should be part of a modern family policy, and 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 at a later time, within the early stages of a child's life. Moreover, there is a growing need for further programmes and strategies to encourage men's involvement in different aspects of family life, in the areas of the labour market, family law, health and social services, education and media.¹⁹

62. Such social protection provisions as old-age pensions are key to advancing intergenerational solidarity. School, community and workplace-based programmes, such as volunteer programmes for young and old, activities in multi-generational community centres and work-sharing and mentoring programmes have also proven effective in improving intergenerational solidarity and cooperation.

63. The preparations for the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family are intended to reflect on the achievements and shortcomings regarding family-oriented policies and programmes since the first observance of the International Year in 1994. Continuing repercussions of the recent economic and social crisis require new approaches to ensure that families are strengthened as agents of development.

64. Member States may wish to consider the following recommendations:

Family policy

(a) Governments are encouraged to establish or strengthen national agencies or governmental bodies to design, evaluate and monitor family policies; analyse how families affect and are affected by policies; and promote families as a priority subject for study, investment, partnership and political action;

(b) Governments are encouraged to support the United Nations Trust Fund on Family Activities to enable the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to provide greater assistance to countries in family policy development, upon their request;

(c) Governments are encouraged to adopt effective and equitable means of delivering family-centred benefits, including social protection and cash transfers, in order to reduce family poverty, address gender discrimination within families and prevent the intergenerational transfer of poverty. Social expenditure, including social protection benefits, should be safeguarded to protect the most vulnerable families affected by the current economic and social crisis;

(d) Governments are encouraged to ratify and improve the implementation of ILO Convention No. 156 and ILO Convention No. 183 regarding work-family balance. Governments and the private sector are encouraged to strengthen provisions for parental leave; extend flexible work and part-time arrangements for employees with family responsibilities; promote paternal involvement; and support a wide range of childcare arrangements;

(e) Governments and other stakeholders are encouraged to invest in intergenerational solidarity through the provision of social pensions; support volunteering programmes aimed at youth and older persons; investment in cross-generational community centres; and the promotion of intergenerational communication at work through job-sharing and mentoring programmes;

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(f) The Commission for Social Development may consider requesting Governments, regional commissions, specialized agencies of the United Nations system and civil society to report on their activities in support of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family;

(g) Governments, United Nations agencies and bodies, civil society organizations and academic institutions are encouraged to share good practices and data on family policy development, especially in the areas of poverty, work-family balance and intergenerational solidarity;

(h) Governments may consider fostering collaborative engagements with civil society organizations, private enterprises and academic institutions in support of family-oriented policy and programme design, implementation and evaluation, in preparation for the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family.