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**Celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the
International Year of the Family in 2014**

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 68/136. The report focuses on the initiatives and activities by Member States and other relevant stakeholders in observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, at all levels, and on recent family policy developments.



I. Introduction

1. The General Assembly, in its resolution 68/136, encouraged Member States to develop appropriate policies and programmes aimed at tackling family poverty and social exclusion, ensuring work-family balance and addressing intergenerational issues, the three themes guiding the preparations for the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family. In addition, the resolution encourages Member States to promote policies on the prevention of violence within the family, such as domestic violence and the abuse of older persons.

2. In its resolution 2014/8, the Economic and Social Council invited Member States and the organizations of the United Nations system, as well as other relevant stakeholders, to take into account the role of the family as a contributor to sustainable development and the need to strengthen family policy development in their ongoing efforts to achieve the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. In addition, both resolutions urged Member States to give due consideration to advancing family policy development in the elaboration of the post-2015 development agenda.

3. The present report is the fifth report on the preparations for and observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year. Section II of the report focuses on policymaking in the context of the preparations for and observance of the anniversary in the areas of poverty reduction, work-family balance, intergenerational issues and the prevention of violence within the family. Section III gives an overview of major events organized in celebration of the anniversary at all levels, including civil society initiatives. The final section of the report puts forward several conclusions and recommendations.

II. Family policymaking in the context of the preparations for and observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family

A. Family-oriented policies for poverty reduction

4. The preparations for the twentieth anniversary led many Member States to make concrete efforts to improve family well-being, in particular through policies tackling family poverty, ensuring work-family balance and supporting intergenerational relations and intergenerational solidarity.

5. Several Member States reported addressing the intergenerational transmission of poverty by prioritizing and scaling up support for vulnerable families with young children, including through the provision of conditional and universal cash transfers, child allowances and in-kind support measures. Some countries faced with fertility rates far below replacement level prioritized support to young and large families through financial and housing assistance.

6. Despite such efforts, social protection remains a right unfulfilled for most children and families. According to the International Labour Organization, although specific provisions for child and family benefits exist in 108 countries, they more often than not cover only a limited segment of the population. A further 75 countries have no policy or programme in that regard. Countries spend on average only

0.4 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) on child and family benefits, with the amount ranging from 0.2 per cent in Africa and in Asia and the Pacific, to 2.2 per cent in Western Europe. Even with the expansion of cash transfer programmes in Latin America and the Caribbean, the expenditure in that region stands at 0.7 per cent, a level similar to that observed in the Middle East and North Africa as well as in Central and Eastern Europe. In higher-income countries, fiscal consolidation and adjustments have had a negative impact on children and families, with child poverty on the rise in 19 countries of the European Union between 2007 and 2012.¹

7. According to the most recent “Innocenti Report Card” published by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Office of Research — Innocenti, around 76.5 million children live in households whose income is below the poverty line in the 41 most affluent countries. The longer those children remain in poverty, the more difficult it will be for them to escape. Evidence also suggests that the poorest and most vulnerable children have suffered disproportionately, as the tax changes and social transfers intended to help them have been relatively ineffective.²

8. Moreover, despite a significant extension of programmes in some parts of the world, existing social protection schemes such as family and child allowances and cash transfers do not meet the income security needs of children and families, especially in middle- and low-income countries with large child populations.

9. Some countries conducted a review of current family assistance programmes and their impact on the intergenerational transmission of poverty as part of the observance of the twentieth anniversary. The fifth International Congress on the Family, organized by Mexico’s National System for Integral Family Development and held in Colima, Mexico, from 3 to 5 September 2014, discussed the outcome of such reviews and acknowledged both the variety of risks and challenges faced by families and the principal role of the Government in promoting family empowerment and economic independence. Issues discussed included family resilience, children’s rights, the impact of technologies on family dynamics and the role of the family in human and professional development.

B. Work-family balance policies

10. Tackling the intergenerational transmission of poverty within families requires focusing on access to gainful employment and creating a better environment for work-family balance. Increasingly, employers recognize the fact that workers’ productivity depends to a significant extent on motivation, training and commitment. Flexible working arrangements have proved to increase commitment, motivation and productivity and a company’s ability to attract and retain committed personnel. A reduction in the rate of employee turnover also reduces the costs of recruitment and training.

11. Work-family balance policies also aim to promote gender equality and encourage better sharing of household responsibilities between men and women.

¹ International Labour Organization, *World Social Protection Report 2014/15. Building economic recovery, inclusive development and social justice* (Geneva, International Labour Office, 2014).

² UNICEF Office of Research — Innocenti, “Children of the Recession: The impact of the economic crisis on child well-being in rich countries”, *Innocenti Report Card 12* (Florence, UNICEF Office of Research, 2014).

Although the rate of men's participation in childcare and other household tasks has been rising, women, including those who are in full-time employment, still take the brunt of the responsibility for household tasks. A growing number of Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries are introducing parental leave provisions aimed at encouraging fathers to participate in childcare responsibilities and fostering greater gender equality. Many countries have also invested in early childhood education and expanding the provision of childcare for children below 3 years of age. Such initiatives appear to have resulted in greater labour participation by women and higher fertility across OECD countries.³

12. Work-family balance policies are high on many national agendas, with some Governments offering subsidies to family-friendly companies and strengthening the capacity of preschool facilities and programmes. Family-friendly company certificates have been introduced in several countries in order to encourage and validate participation in and expansion of family-friendly management in businesses. The criteria for certification usually include the availability of parental leave, flexible working schedules and overall support for mothers and fathers in the workplace.

13. Advocacy for work-family balance has been the focus of many notable initiatives by civil society organizations. The Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union has been active in promoting 2014 as a Year of Reconciling Work and Family Life in Europe. Its "Families in the crisis — finding work-life balance in difficult economic context" conference, held in Athens on 28 and 29 April 2014, focused on the negative effects of austerity measures and cuts in social services in Europe in the aftermath of recent crises. In addition, the Confederation's European Employers' Forum for Work-Life Balance, held in Helsinki, in September 2014, offered an exchange platform between employers from the private, public and non-profit sectors, experts and representatives of social partners, scientists and researchers to discuss family-friendly workplace measures and share knowledge and good practices. The Forum featured several examples of flexible work arrangements that demonstrated concrete outcomes in increasing company productivity, employee satisfaction, responsibility and gender equality.

C. Intergenerational programmes

14. Families are the main channel for interaction between generations. However, their capacity to provide intergenerational support varies and is often contingent on policies and programmes that provide additional resources. There is also increasing evidence that strong intergenerational ties in families may lead to a fairer distribution of resources and assets among different generations.

15. As care for older persons is still mostly provided by family members, the number of supportive programmes for caregivers, such as respite care and information and access to counselling services, have been on the rise. An innovative approach to elder care being tested in some countries includes compensating for income loss as a result of working part-time in order to care for older parents.

³ Olivier Thévenon, "Politiques familiales, fécondité et emploi des femmes: apports et limites des comparaisons au niveau national", *Document de travail* no. 200 (Paris, Institut national d'études démographiques (INED), 2014).

16. Intergenerational issues were the focus of the fourth session of the African Union Conference of Ministers of Social Development, held in Addis Ababa from 26 to 30 May 2014, the theme of which was “Strengthening the African Family for Inclusive Development in Africa”. The conference endorsed a draft protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, on the rights of older persons in Africa, which called on States parties to identify, promote and strengthen traditional support systems, including medical home-based care, to enhance the ability of families and communities to care for older family members and to foster and strengthen intergenerational dialogue and solidarity within their families and communities. The Conference also launched an Africa-wide campaign to end child marriage by addressing its root causes: poverty and gender discrimination.

17. Civil society organizations have played a leading role in advocating for policies and programmes promoting intergenerational support and exchange. Some of their recommendations include promoting equitable access to resources that strengthen family ties, particularly among lower income families, as well as improving access to and the use of technology to strengthen interaction between family members of all ages. Many non-governmental organizations also support intergenerational programmes, such as positive parenting classes and mentoring programmes. In some countries, civil society organizations hand out intergenerational awards to communities that recognize and value the contributions of individuals of all ages.

D. Prevention of violence within the family

18. Evidence from multiple countries points to policies for greater gender equality and the prevention of violence being critical for ensuring family well-being. Domestic violence creates an adverse environment for all family members. Violence within the family puts children at risk of behavioural and emotional problems, including aggressive, antisocial, fearful and inhibited behaviours, low self-esteem, lowered social competence and withdrawal symptoms, often leading to underachievement in school.

19. Women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons are most vulnerable to violence within the family and other types of violence. Globally, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 47 per cent of female homicide victims of all ages are killed by family members or intimate partners.⁴ In some countries, 70 per cent of girls report their current or former husbands as perpetrators of violence. Worldwide, one in three adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 in formal unions experienced emotional, physical and/or sexual violence from their husbands or partners. Partner violence is especially high in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean.⁵

20. Building on the Secretary-General’s original commitment to “UNiTE to End Violence against Women”, with the leadership of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women, the United Nations launched the “HeforShe” campaign on 7 March 2014. The solidarity movement is aimed at

⁴ *Global Study on Homicide 2013* (United Nations publication, Sales No. 14.IV.1).

⁵ United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), *Hidden in Plain Sight: a statistical analysis of violence against children* (New York, 2014).

mobilizing men and boys for gender equality. Its initial aim is to reach prominent male leaders and 100,000 men. It attests to the fact that more efforts are needed to involve men in the fight against gender inequality, which often manifests itself through domestic violence.

21. Awareness-raising and the sharing of good practices regarding domestic violence interventions is indispensable for the overall prevention of domestic and other forms of violence within the family. Through its database, the European Institute for Gender Equality offers examples of methods and tools for prevention of and protection from domestic violence in the areas of gender training, awareness-raising and victim support services.⁶

22. Among the various forms of violence against children, corporal punishment remains widespread. Children are legally protected from all forms of corporal punishment, including at home, in only 39 countries. Such lack of protection, in combination with tacit approval of corporal punishment by parents or caregivers, creates an environment in which different forms of violence are treated with impunity. Some data suggest that rates of violence against children in care institutions appear to be much higher than those of children living in family-based foster care.⁵

23. There are several risk factors increasing the likelihood of violence against children within their families, such as family poverty, parental unemployment and low levels of parental education. Parenting education programmes can reduce some of those risks. For instance, the so-called ages and stages approach in parenting education informs parents of typical and appropriate behaviours of newborns, toddlers, preschoolers and school-age children, as well as appropriate caregiver responses. A recent review of parenting support services indicates that they should avoid stigmatization of those in need, recognize parents as proactive agents rather than passive beneficiaries and involve both parents.⁷

24. In 2014, several civil society events in observance of the Global Day of Parents, proclaimed by the General Assembly in its resolution 66/292, advocated for a deeper appreciation of the role of parenting in child development. Some events also focused on the use of social media by children in family settings. A number of conferences on positive parenting brought together family professionals and parents wishing to improve their parenting skills.⁸ Raising awareness of and advocacy for the prevention of family violence were the focus of several national seminars and events actively promoted by civil society.⁹ Many non-governmental organizations offered parenting education courses and support services for caregivers.

25. Internationally comparable data on the abuse of older persons are not readily available, making it difficult to have a good understanding of the scope of the problem

⁶ See <http://eige.europa.eu/methods-and-tools/domestic-violence> for more information.

⁷ Daniel Molinuevo, "Parenting support in Europe", European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) (2013).

⁸ Among the organizers of such events were the Universal Peace Federation, the International Federation for Family Development, the Family Watch, Unión de Asociaciones Familiares and Asociación Consuelo Berges Mujeres Separadas y/o Divorciadas.

⁹ See, for instance, the national seminar on "Impact of Violence on Social Institutions (Family, Education and Community)", organized by the Service and Research Institute on Family and Children, which focused on domestic violence, poverty and violence and the impact of the media.

and to monitor trends, as reported by the Secretary-General (A/68/167). Elder abuse remains a taboo in many societies and older victims tend to keep silent for fear of exposing a family member, losing support or being placed in an institutional setting against their will. Detection of abuse among people with limited or reduced capacity, such as those with Alzheimer's disease, may be even more difficult, since they may not be able to articulate their need for support. Therefore, even in countries where the reporting of abuse is mandatory, underreporting is likely to be substantial. Neglect, abuse and violence against older women, including some harmful traditional practices and customs within families as well as the plight of widows, especially in countries where they lack economic or legal rights, are matters of special concern.

26. Existing programmes and legislation focusing on protection from violence have recently been broadened to address abuse in domestic settings in a number of countries. However, similar measures have been lagging in care facilities (see E/CN.5/2014/4). Some Governments have taken steps to prevent situations that could lead to abuse in family settings through awareness-raising and information campaigns. Other countries initiated training and support to individuals who are caregivers for their older relatives. In addition, a few countries have started offering adult day-care services, as well as subsidizing informal caregiver respite. In some countries, domestic violence and family laws provide protection, but often lack an explicit reference to older persons. In other countries, there are laws on social assistance but no legal protection from abuse. In some countries, acts concerning domestic violence have been amended to include elder abuse (see A/68/167).

27. In a few countries, legal frameworks for reporting and litigating against the abuse of older adults exist. Several African countries have developed national policies on ageing, which generally include provisions for addressing elder abuse. In spite of advances at a general policy level, there are few actual programmatic responses to elder abuse and mistreatment.¹⁰

III. Celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family at all levels

A. Commission for Social Development

28. The Commission for Social Development held a high-level panel discussion in observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family during its fifty-second session, held from 11 to 21 February 2014. The panel acknowledged that families have a lasting impact on the achievement of development goals, particularly in the areas of education, health, gender equality and women's empowerment. However, despite their contributions, families are seen mostly as recipients rather than contributors to development.

29. Echoing the session's priority theme on promoting empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all, delegates emphasized that empowering people required empowering families as agents of development and recognized that family policies are an integral part of an inclusive development approach (see E/2014/26-E/CN.5/2014/10).

¹⁰ *Neglect, Abuse and Violence against Older Women* (ST/ESA/351).

30. During the discussion, a number of delegates raised concerns over the future of traditional family and solidarity systems that are currently under pressure from demographic, social and cultural trends, ranging from falling fertility and rapid ageing, to increased expression of individual rights and individual identity. As a result, the role of the family as a primary agent of socialization and education may be eroding in contrast to the growing influence of the media. High divorce rates, cohabitation and non-marital childbearing were sometimes seen as undermining family stability and children's well-being.

31. On the other hand, a number of delegates emphasized that families were changing and that various forms of families were increasingly recognized at the national level, albeit not at the international level. Delegates further emphasized that there was a need to take into account the numerous functions, responsibilities and needs of families in addressing poverty, work-life balance and intergenerational support.

32. Several Member States reported on recent family policy developments, such as guidelines for integrated family policies aimed at remediating past fragmented approaches or the devolution of family programmes to local entities, as well as partnerships with civil society and the private sector. Some countries showcased how their national family policy frameworks aimed to mainstream a family perspective in legislation, policies, procedures, regulations and overall development programmes, while others focused on assistance to large families, families with persons with disabilities and single-headed households.

33. The discussion suggested that, despite visible improvements in designing family policies in some regions, progress has been uneven and numerous challenges exist. Among them is the lack of research and reliable statistics which can inform and influence policy formulation and evaluation, especially in the areas of work-family balance and gender equality.

34. A proposal was made to include an item on family and development in the agenda of the Economic and Social Council. As an alternative, family-oriented, cross-cutting goals could be considered within the framework of the post-2015 development agenda. There was general agreement that the success of family policies rests on the active engagement of and cooperation among Governments, civil society, the private sector and families themselves.

B. Human Rights Council

35. At its twenty-seventh session, the Human Rights Council held a panel discussion on the protection of the family and its members. The panellists emphasized that the family and the rights of its members were addressed in the provisions of several human rights instruments, which defined the obligations of States to provide assistance and protection to the family.

36. The panel underlined that, in its General Comment No. 19, the Human Rights Committee had noted that the concept of the family may differ, in some respects, from State to State, and even from region to region within a State, and that it was therefore not possible to give the concept a standard definition. When a group of persons is regarded as a family under the legislation and practice of a State,

however, it must be given the protection referred to in article 23 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

37. In a discussion following presentations by experts, the majority of delegates noted that families assumed diverse forms and functions among and within countries, along with evolving cultural and social norms. Consequently, it was important to accept the concept of various forms of the family and ensure the protection of all family members. Some Member States also reported on some important paradigm shifts, such as the recognition of the rights of all children regardless of the marital status of their parents.

38. Several speakers also expressed concern over human rights violations within the family, particularly violence against children, persons with disabilities or older persons, as well as discriminatory family law regimes that prevail in many countries in terms of decision-making, marriage dissolution, property rights and custody rights, resulting in continued discrimination against women. Families in conflict and humanitarian emergency situations were singled out as deserving special protection and assistance in order to be kept together or reunited as soon as possible.

C. Department of Economic and Social Affairs

39. The Division for Social Policy and Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs conducted research and organized expert meetings and awareness-raising events in preparation for and observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year. Two international expert group meetings offered an analysis of existing policies and programmes relating to family poverty, work-family balance and intergenerational issues and put forward a number of recommendations.

40. An expert group meeting on “Assessing family policies: confronting family poverty and social exclusion and ensuring work-family balance” was held in New York from 1 to 3 June 2011. Experts recommended applying a family-centred perspective to policy decisions and analysing the effect of all policies on families, as well as adopting a life-cycle approach to work-family balance and long-term family economic self-sufficiency, recognizing the changing needs of families caring for family members of different ages.¹¹

41. An expert group meeting on “Good practices in family policymaking: family policy development, monitoring and implementation: lessons learnt” was held in New York from 15 to 17 May 2012 and reviewed national and regional approaches to family policy development. The experts recommended, inter alia, broadening family law to expand women’s rights, promoting fair custody rights in the best interest of the child and ensuring that access to resources was gender-neutral. They also emphasized the importance of national campaigns and literacy training to educate women and men about their rights and obligations under family law.

42. The Division for Social Policy and Development organized commemorations, side events of the Commission for Social Development, seminars and workshops in observance of the International Day of Families, which aimed to raise awareness of

¹¹ Information on the events organized by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs is available from <http://undesadspd.org/Family.aspx>.

the importance of family policies in overall development efforts. Several events were organized in cooperation with United Nations bodies and regional entities, civil society organizations, academics and researchers.

43. Such events included a side event during the fifty-second session of the Commission for Social Development, on global perspectives on family well-being: work-family and intergenerational issues reconsidered, organized in cooperation with the New York NGO Committee on the Family, which featured presentations on work-family balance and global transformations, unpaid work and intergenerational equity, as well as intergenerational ties and well-being.

44. The special observance of the International Day, for 2014, on the theme “Families matter for the achievement of development goals: International Year of the Family +20” was organized in cooperation with the Department of Public Information. It focused on building better public policy for families by communicating research to policymakers and featured major civil society initiatives in observance of the anniversary.

D. Civil society

International initiatives

45. Worldwide, civil society has been actively engaged in the preparations for and observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year. The civil society declaration on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year, proposed and disseminated by the International Federation for Family Development, was sponsored by 27 international entities and signed by over 542 civil society representatives from 285 national organizations, as well as by elected officials, academics and individuals. The Federation actively promoted the objectives of the anniversary, mobilizing support for its declaration and organizing a number of awareness-raising events throughout the year. It also carried out several communications projects to promote a family perspective among governments and international organizations, including a website listing events organized worldwide in observance of the twentieth anniversary and issuing research papers focusing on topics relating to the themes of the anniversary.¹²

46. The Doha International Family Institute organized an international conference in observance of the anniversary, on the theme “Empowering families: a pathway to development”, held in Doha on 16 and 17 April 2014. The conference served as a non-governmental gathering and a global platform for discussion and debate where policymakers, non-governmental organizations, experts, academics and Government officials shared their views regarding the centrality of the family and its role in society. Several panel discussions focused on family and poverty, work-family balance, intergenerational ties, families affected by HIV/AIDS, humanitarian disasters and conflicts, gender equality, men in families, family data and research, national institutions and family policy, family and civil society. A World Family Map Project and family impact seminars were also features of the event.¹³

¹² More information available from www.family2014.org.

¹³ More information available from www.difi.org.qa/events/.

47. The Conference issued a “Doha Call to Action”, calling upon Governments to empower and enable families to contribute to development by, inter alia, developing comprehensive policies to support family stability; promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and reforming discriminatory family laws. The document captures civil society’s concern regarding the need for legislation to end child marriage and violence against women and for more efforts promoting active fatherhood. It also acknowledges that family breakdown could be both a cause and an outcome of poverty and recommends focusing on work-family balance, strengthening intergenerational solidarity and ensuring systematic collection of data and statistics on family well-being. The Conference supported the inclusion of a family focus in the post-2015 development agenda.¹³

48. The International Federation for Home Economics organized a meeting of its Council, in London, Ontario, Canada, from 20 to 24 July 2014, on the theme “Celebrating the 20th anniversary of the International Year of the Family 2014”. The meeting acknowledged that home economics education contributed to the achievement of several Millennium Development Goals, such as reducing family poverty, lowering maternal mortality and improving maternal health. The meeting called upon civil society to influence the development of family-oriented policies and to promote public debate on family policy design, implementation and monitoring. The organization launched a campaign promoting the anniversary, entitled: “Empowering Families, Individuals and Communities through Home Economics”, which added visibility to the commemorations of the anniversary among members of the organization and beyond. The International Federation also launched a commemorative publication, entitled “Family Socioeconomic and Cultural Issues: A Continuing Home Economics Concern”.

49. The Universal Peace Federation organized several events in observance of the anniversary, including a forum on “The Family as a Driver for Social Development”, held in New York on 20 February 2014, which addressed the need to promote the role of the family in achieving sustainable development goals and showcased policies and practices that include and strengthen the family.

50. The New York NGO Committee on the Family hosted a number of monthly meetings in observance of the anniversary. Good practices in family policymaking were discussed, including programmes which increase father-child engagement or build up parents’ capacity to foster children’s literacy. The Committee also co-sponsored several side events during the fifty-second session of the Commission for Social Development, including an event on the theme “Older people and families count: looking at empowerment, decent work and poverty eradication”.

51. The Vienna NGO Committee on the Family organized an international forum where it presented an update of its study, entitled “Documenting Contributions of Civil Society Organisations to the Well-Being of Families”. The study indicated that civil society organizations were mostly involved in the areas of economic, financial, education and subsistence services for families. The proceedings of the forum, including presentations from several civil society organizations, were published in the online quarterly bulletin of the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family, “Families International”.¹⁴

¹⁴ More information available from www.viennafamilycommittee.org and www.20yearsIYF.org.

Regional initiatives

52. In preparation for the twentieth anniversary of the International Year, regional expert group meetings and capacity development workshops were held in Europe, Africa, North and South America and in the Middle East and North Africa. In 2014, an expert group meeting for North America was organized by the International Federation for Family Development and Family Watch, in cooperation with the National Council on Family Relations (United States of America), the Vanier Institute of the Family (Canada) and the focal point on the family within the Division for Social Policy and Development. Experts presented current research on social exclusion, spatial inequality and poverty, social capital and socioeconomic mobility, changing family structures, parental leaves, childcare arrangements and innovative flexible working arrangements. A number of intergenerational issues, including grandparental care, the transfer of resources between generations and caring for children and older persons were also discussed. Good practices from the region, such as family justice centres, parental education courses and intergenerational community networks were presented and discussed by practitioners.¹¹

53. The African Preparatory Conference, which covered such themes as confronting family poverty and social exclusion, ensuring work-family balance, and advancing social integration and intergenerational solidarity in Africa, was held in Nairobi on 23 and 24 January 2014 and was organized by Voice of the Family in Africa International and the Law School of Strathmore University in Kenya. Issues discussed at the conference included social protection for families at risk, empowering young women, work-family balance initiatives, family policies and family, informal work, fertility and parenthood. Persistent poverty, informal working arrangements, insecurity, crime and corruption were cited as the main obstacles to development in Africa. On the positive side, several African countries have made or envision changes in their constitution so as to adopt a rights-based approach to the provision of social services.

National initiatives

54. In Argentina, the anniversary was marked by a number of meetings and outreach activities involving civil society, the private sector, local government representatives and academics, during events held from 25 to 27 March 2014. Among them was a meeting on work-family balance hosted by the Centro Walmart Conciliación Familia y Empresa of IAE Business School at Austral University. The work of an international network of companies committed to promoting flexible and family-friendly policies and an index measuring corporate family responsibility were presented. Several companies showcased their family-friendly policies, which won prizes in 2013 for corporate family responsibility.

55. Families Australia celebrated the anniversary by organizing a National Families Week, on the theme “Stronger families, stronger communities”, throughout Australia, from 15 to 21 May 2014. The annual event has been organized with financial support from the Government of Australia since 2003. Families Australia, with its 750 member organizations, reached a record number of 130,000 participants all across Australia through this event. The organization strives to improve the well-being of all Australian families and works to promote a national policy

environment in which the needs and interests of families, especially the most vulnerable and marginalized, are heard and addressed. In 2014, the important role of families as central building blocks of communities was highlighted.

56. A commemorative event and working meetings on family policies in Brazil were organized in São Paulo, on 24 and 25 March 2014, by the Instituto Brasileiro da Família with the participation of Centro Internacional Trabalho-Família of ISE Business School in São Paulo, as well as civil society organizations such as the Confederação Nacional das Entidades de Família. The effectiveness of family-centred national programmes for poverty eradication, such as *Bolsa Família*, as well challenges in their implementation at the local level, were discussed.

57. A joint conference on “Development of Korean Families and Family Policies, 1994-2014” and “Celebrating the 20th anniversary of the International Year of the Family” was held in Seoul on 10 May 2014 by the Korean Family Association and the Center for Family Policy and Multicultural Society of Korean Women’s Development Institute and sponsored by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family and Seoul National University. The Framework Act on Healthy Families, passed in 2004, requires local governments to provide comprehensive and preventive family services through healthy family support centres, while the Multi-Cultural Family Support Act, enacted in 2008, provides social integration services to legal aliens and immigrants married to Korean citizens.¹⁵ In addition, provision has been made for special services for families at risk, such as low-income families, single parents and those who struggle with domestic violence. The conference concluded that, to date, policies aiming to facilitate women’s entry into the labour market, combined with some work-family balance measures, had not resulted in increased fertility, which was their main goal. Another challenging area was engaging men in family life, including through the use of paternity leave. Moreover, rapid ageing of the population required better support for families with multiple caring responsibilities.

58. In Portugal, PROSALIS: Projecto de Saúde em Lisboa, a Portuguese family organization with a focus on health, organized several meetings and workshops in observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year. Its twenty-fourth workshop on family policies, on the theme “Recognition of the family as the first intergenerational nucleus”, held in Lisbon on 18 March 2014, addressed a variety of intergenerational issues from a family perspective and emphasized that the success of social integration and inclusion efforts depends on the effectiveness of public policies and the support from and involvement of local communities, civil society and families themselves.¹²

59. As part of their corporate responsibility initiatives, Tudor Rose, a publishing company based in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, published “Family Futures” an illustrated commemorative publication on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year. The publication features articles on the three themes of the anniversary, with over 100 authors sharing their work on family policy development and actions at the international, regional, national and local levels. The publication offers a review of good practices

¹⁵ Meejung Chin and others, “Family Policy in South Korea: Development, Implementation, and Evaluation”, in *Handbook of Family Policies Across the Globe*, Mihaela Robila, ed. (New York, Springer, 2014).

in family policymaking by Government officials, civil society actors, academics and researchers.

E. Large-scale research

60. Research focusing on families as units of analysis is indispensable for developing, monitoring and evaluating, as well as improving, family policies. Family policy monitoring and evaluation should identify the most effective use of resources, as well as ineffective practices that should be discontinued. National surveys on family dynamics covering intrafamilial interactions are also useful for better policy development, as is comparative analysis of family policy outcomes at regional levels. Large-scale research projects aiming to guide future family policy developments are currently being conducted by both the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the European Union.

61. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development remains at the forefront of research on family policymaking and outcomes. Its recent findings indicate that the scope of family policy across OECD countries is expanding, as spending on family benefits is increasing.¹⁶ Still, there is no clear trend in the use of cash, in-kind or fiscal support as delivery channels for support, and the extent to which these three forms of support are used remains very different across countries. There has been a slight shift in spending towards programmes for children aged 6 or under in many countries. The maximum leave period that mothers can avail of after childbirth has increased to almost one year across many countries. Research indicates that childcare provisions have been positively associated with an increase in fertility rates and female employment and, less significantly, with a decrease in infant mortality. Moreover, public spending on family benefits and the duration of paid child-related leave for mothers is associated with an increase in the total fertility rate. Tax incentives for part-time work are associated with an increase in female employment, while public spending on health care is found to be strongly associated with a decrease in infant mortality.

62. A major European research project financed by the European Union and aimed at investigating the diversity of family forms, relationships and life courses in Europe is currently under way. The project is to assess the compatibility of existing policies with family changes and contribute to evidence-based policymaking. Financed by the European Union, the project entails the collaboration of 25 research partners in 15 European countries and three international civil society actors combining expertise in social sciences, law and the humanities.¹⁷

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

63. The preparations for and observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family have demonstrated that family-oriented policies and programmes, ranging from cash transfers and a variety of family

¹⁶ Willem Adema, Nabil Ali and Olivier Thévenon, “Changes in Family Policies and Outcomes: Is there Convergence?”, OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, No. 157 (Paris, OECD Publishing, 2014).

¹⁷ More information available from www.familiesandsocieties.eu.

support programmes, to innovative work-family balance strategies and diverse policies supporting intergenerational solidarity and cooperation, contribute to social development and the achievement of a broad range of development goals. Findings also point to the fact that policies based on explicit considerations of intragenerational and intergenerational dynamics, as well as gender dynamics within families, have a further and often untapped potential to contribute to the realization of the human rights of all family members.

64. At the same time, a protracted debate over family definitions impedes progress towards the inclusion of pragmatic references to families as an integral part of the development agenda in international forums. From a family policy perspective, however, the definition of the family depends on the context and the purpose and may vary over time, across jurisdictions, among racial and ethnic groups and in different political, cultural and social systems. Families keep changing, with evolving societal norms and expectations. They are shaped by new educational opportunities, changing labour markets and the new demands posed by them, as well as by individual choices. Many changes in family structures and composition over the past decades have been affected by rising levels of cohabitation, non-marital childbearing and divorce, which are often seen as leading to greater family instability and even inequality.¹⁸ In a growing number of countries, however, new family structures and compositions have become part of the norm and accepted by society at large. Following such changes, a greater recognition of family diversity and needs is essential for better family-oriented policies and programmes.

65. Meanwhile, family policy development has not kept up with changing norms and expectations or the rising difficulties families experience in fulfilling their numerous functions. As a result, family policies too often continue to target children and/or women individually and ignore the family unit as such. Moreover, policies claiming to focus on vulnerable families often concentrate on a mother and a child, with little attention given to other family members, including the father or the grandparents. Interventions focusing on single-parent families rarely take into account the role of cohabiting and/or non-custodial parents in the lives of children.

66. Family policies and programmes should aim to promote the well-being of families and their individual members by addressing all their functions, including family formation, partnership, economic support, women's empowerment, reconciling work and family responsibilities, child-rearing and child development and facilitating intergenerational care and support. Legal reform and revision of family laws should promote gender equality and protection from violence within the family, particularly for the most vulnerable family members.

67. Well-functioning, stable and supportive families form the basis for children's education and are critical to their economic and emotional well-being and the realization of their rights. As child marriage, often linked to family poverty, is reinforced at the family level, its eradication also requires family-oriented anti-poverty solutions. Policy responses offering income support for families with children have not proven sufficient to break the intergenerational

¹⁸ In some countries, such as the United States of America, cohabitation and non-marital births are more likely to be concentrated in lower income and lower education strata of society.

transfer of poverty. They have to be accompanied by access to health care, education and affordable housing, as well as decent jobs with steady incomes, thereby ensuring sustainable livelihoods.

68. As family issues are multisectoral in nature and cannot be addressed by a single ministry or governmental agency, more attention should also be paid to integrated and coordinated approaches. Similarly, the development of national family plans and strategies requires engagement with relevant stakeholders such as civil society organizations, the private sector and families themselves.

69. The number of initiatives taken at both the international and national levels in observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family is testimony to the relevance of family-oriented policies and programmes for the achievement of internationally agreed development goals.

70. Specific recommendations on family-oriented policies focusing on confronting family poverty, ensuring work-family balance and advancing social integration and intergenerational solidarity have been offered in recent reports of the Secretary-General on the preparations for and observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year¹⁹ and reflected in a number of resolutions of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council. Member States and other stakeholders are encouraged to consider those as well as the following recommendations:

(a) Governments are urged to further advance family-centred policies and programmes as part of an integrated, comprehensive and inclusive approach to development;

(b) Member States should invest in a variety of family-oriented policies and programmes as an important tool for fighting poverty, social exclusion and inequality, promoting work-family balance and gender equality, advancing social integration and intergenerational solidarity, as well as preventing violence within families;

(c) Governments, in partnership with relevant stakeholders, should support data collection and research on family issues and the impact of public policy on families and invest in family-oriented policy and programme design, implementation and evaluation;

(d) The Commission for Social Development may consider requesting that future reports of the Secretary-General focus thematically on specific issues relevant to and/or affecting families and their contribution to development.

¹⁹ See [A/67/61-E/2012/3](#), [A/68/61-E/2013/3](#) and [A/69/61-E/2014/4](#).