



[www.viennafamilycommittee.org](http://www.viennafamilycommittee.org)  
[www.10yearsIFY.org](http://www.10yearsIFY.org)  
[www.civilsocietynetworks.org](http://www.civilsocietynetworks.org)  
[www.20yearsIYF.org](http://www.20yearsIYF.org)

## **Quarterly Bulletin of the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family**

March 2021, No. 117  
Deadline for contributions: 15.05.2021

**Vienna NGO Committee on the Family**  
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Dear Readers of Families International,

In an address to the United Nations General Assembly 51<sup>st</sup> Plenary Session, the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, declared 2021 the “annus possibilitatis” or the year of possibilities and hope. With several Covid-19 vaccines already approved and in use, this new year promises to be different from the “annus horribilis” 2020. In addition to the global vaccination efforts, there are also numerous other projects working on providing hope and achieving progress around the world. This issue of Families International focuses on highlighting some of these different ways in which positive change is affected.

After a look back with the Annual Report 2020 of the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family, this 117<sup>th</sup> issue of FI also provides a look forward to the rescheduled International Forum now organised by the Committee for May 2021. Further included is the Committee’s Statement to the Commission for Social Development, which was compiled by Franziska Reichel, the Committee Coordinator for the United Nations Commission for Social Development, in cooperation with the Secretary of the Committee Dr. Peter Crowley. This Statement was signed by three member organisations of the Committee, namely the International Council of Women, International Kolping Society and Latter-Day Saint Charities. The International Federation for Home Economics (IFHE), the International Federation for Family Development (IFFD), and Make Mothers Matter (MMM), member organisations of the Committee, also submitted their individual statements to the CSD, which are also included in this issue. These Statements are followed by a brief reference and link to the Report of the United Nations Secretary-General 2020 to the CSD, as well as a text on supporting job search for Mauritian youth by the World Bank. Two further member organisations’ contributions to FI can also be found in this issue: The IFFD’s paper addresses the importance of parenting for children in the 21<sup>st</sup> century while MMM’s article focuses on placing care and education at the heart of a new human rights-based economic system. Finally, a list of recent and upcoming events is provided.

Sincerely,

Karin Kuzmanov B.A., B.A.  
Executive-Editor

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*From the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family*

**VIENNA NGO COMMITTEE ON THE FAMILY**



[www.viennafamilycommittee.org](http://www.viennafamilycommittee.org)

Digital Networks:

[www.10yearsIYF.org](http://www.10yearsIYF.org)

[www.20yearsIYF.org](http://www.20yearsIYF.org)

[www.civilsocietynetworks.org](http://www.civilsocietynetworks.org)



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***ANNUAL REPORT 2020***

**Since its inception in 1985 projects of the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family have been supported by:**

- ❖ Austrian Federal Government
- ❖ Bank Austria Creditanstalt
- ❖ Berndorf Group
- ❖ Country Womens Association in Lower Austria
- ❖ E.F.T. Transportagency GmbH
- ❖ European Commission
- ❖ Government of Germany
- ❖ Government of Liechtenstein
- ❖ Government of Luxembourg
- ❖ Government of Spain, Catalonia and the Balearic Islands
- ❖ International Non-Governmental Organisations
- ❖ Lower Austrian State Government
- ❖ Lower Austrian Insurance AG
- ❖ OMV Energy Group
- ❖ Rotary International
- ❖ Schoeller-Bleckmann Oilfield Equipment AG
- ❖ Shell Austria AG
- ❖ Siemens
- ❖ United Nations Trust Fund on Family Activities



## Vienna NGO Committee on the Family



### *PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES 2020*

At a Full Committee Meeting, which was held as a Zoom video conference, representatives of the 41 International Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), who are members of the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family, and 22 associate member organisations, discussed various institution-building projects and activities. The Board of the Committee had worked out a schedule for their implementation, which was realised in co-operation with the support of the member organisations of the Committee and their representatives. The worldwide network of civil society organisations, research and university institutions, government agencies and individuals, continues to be, not only a beneficiary of interactive exchange, but is in many cases, directly involved in the work of the Committee. The Vienna Committee on the Family, understands itself as a non-political, non-denominational umbrella organisation, with a global focus on the well-being of families worldwide, providing a bridge between families-oriented Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), The United Nations, Governments of Member States of the United Nations and Academia, as well as between CSOs themselves, through the various digital networks set up and maintained by the Committee.

### *The following projects were realised in 2020*

#### **1. Families International (FI)**

Issues, Nos. 113-116 of the Quarterly Bulletin of the Committee, were published online in 2020 at [www.viennafamilycommittee.org](http://www.viennafamilycommittee.org) At the end of 2020, the Editorial Committee consisted of the Deputy Editors, Julia Birner, Christin Kohler, M.A., Karin Kuzmanov B.A., B.A., Isabella Nening, M.A., and the Editor, Peter Crowley, Ph.D., who having been Editor since 2009, and sole Editor until 2018, and having edited Issue No. 116, in December 2020, is handing over the editorship to the four Deputy Editors, just mentioned, and will become Deputy Editor, with issue No. 117 in 2021.

Special features in FI in 2020, included: 'Issues relating to families at the 58th United Nations Commission for Social Development 2020'; 'Research from UNICEF on Gender Equality'; 'Covid-19 and the influences on families' lives, and on the physical and mental health, of adults and children.'; 'Covid-19: Childcare and Work & Family Life and Global Education Systems in Future Crises.'

Each issue of Families International also included texts submitted by member organizations of the Committee as well as other relevant texts from United Nations agencies.

Over five hundred readers of 'Families International' are informed by the Secretariat of the Committee by e-mail, when the latest issue is published and available to download free of cost.

#### **2. International Forum: "Status of food & Nutrition in Europe & Central Asia - Challenges and Actions" with Mary Kenny (UNFAO)**

The Committee organised and scheduled an International Forum, during a Full Committee Meeting, at the United Nations Vienna International Centre (UNVIC) for Monday May 11th 2020, to observe the United International Day of Families (UNIDF) 2020, entitled "Status of food & Nutrition in Europe & Central Asia – Challenges and Actions" with Mary Kenny, a Food Safety and Consumer Protection Officer at the Food and Agricultural Office of the United Nations (UNFAO) Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (REU) in Budapest, who has extensive experience in working with countries to strengthen national food control programmes and related food safety capacities. Mary also manages FAO's work in the region on agri-food trade and market integration, including work on nutrition and sustainable food systems. Mary has a Degree in Environmental Health Officer and a Masters in Food Science and Technology. Due to the rapid spreading of the Covid-19 pandemic this International Forum had to be postponed and it is re-scheduled with Mary Kenny (UNFAO) for Monday May 10<sup>th</sup> 2021, to observe UNIDF 2021 at the UNVIC. If, for continuing health concerns due to the pandemic, the meeting cannot be held in person, it is intended to hold it as a Zoom Video Conference.

**International Forum: ‘Feed the child and save the world’ – life-long effects of food and nutrition that support childhood growth and development with Prof. Mary Flynn**

The Committee further organised a second International Forum, which was held during a Full Committee Meeting, and originally planned to be held in person, at the United Nations Vienna International Centre, on Monday October 19<sup>th</sup> 2020, with Prof. Mary Flynn, who has worked for many years in public health, clinical nutrition and academia in Ireland, Canada and the Middle East. Her work includes the development of best infant feeding practices, food-based guidelines for children and adolescents and programs to support families when children’s weight growth ‘gets ahead’ of their height growth. Currently she leads work on nutrient reference standards for infants and young children at Codex Alimentarius [World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Food & Agricultural Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations]; and was an Expert Advisor on the development of Health Canada’s new Food Guide (2019). In 2014, Mary was awarded the inaugural medal for excellence in Public Health Nutrition by the Nutrition Society in the UK, and was appointed as a member of the first Healthy Ireland Council by the Minister for Health in Ireland and has been a Visiting Professor at Ulster University, Northern Ireland since 2012. Due again to the Covid-19 pandemic, this International Forum was held as a Zoom video Conference. The proceeding of the meeting will be published in an issue of the online quarterly bulletin ‘Families International’ in 2021.

**3. Cooperation with the United Nations Focal Point on the Family in New York**

The Board of the Committee keeps its various networks informed with documents of United Nations Resolutions and Reports of the United Nations Secretary-General pertaining to family issues. A text on the theme for the **United Nations International Day of Families** May 15<sup>th</sup> 2020 entitled: “Families in Development: Copenhagen & Beijing + 25” was included in ‘Families International Issue No. 114: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/family/international-day-of-families/2020-2.html>

The Committee further encouraged its members and the organisations included in the over five hundred addresses on the mailing list of ‘Families International’ to participate in the consultations to prepare the **30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2024 (IYF+30)**: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/family/2020/08/06/iyf30/>

**The 59<sup>th</sup> United Nations Commission for Social Development (UNCSD) 2021** has as its Priority Theme: ‘Socially just transition towards sustainable development: the role of digital technologies on social development and well-being of all.’ The new Committee Coordinator for the UNCSD, Franziska Reichel, composed a statement for the Committee on this theme, in cooperation with the Secretary of the Committee, Peter Crowley Ph.D. and it was signed by a number of member organisations of the Committee and subsequently submitted to the UNCSD by the Committee, and has since become an official document of the UNCSD in 2021. <https://undocs.org/E/CN.5/2021/NGO/18>

An eighty page report, of a study update entitled: ‘**Documenting Contributions of Civil Society Organisation to the Well-Being of Families**’ by Peter Crowley Ph.D. then Secretary of the Committee, in cooperation with the United Nations Focal Point on the Family, which was presented by the author, at the United Nations in New York, to observe the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the United Nations International Year of the Family, is available to download, on the United Nations website: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/family/international-day-of-families/2014-3.html>

The following quotation from the Report of the United Nations Secretary-General to the General Assembly on November 26<sup>th</sup> 2019, (A/75/61-E/2020/4) which relates to activities of the Committee as recently as 2019, brings to bear the appreciation of the highest office of the United Nations for the endeavours of our Committee, the Member Organisations and their representatives, for the well-being of families worldwide. “The Vienna NGO Committee on the Family organized two international forums. One forum, held in cooperation with the United Nations Office on Drugs & Crime, was focused on the global effort to end the AIDS epidemic by 2030, in the light of Sustainable Development Goal 3. The other, which was focused on child and youth media protection, from the

perspective of parents, was the third of in a series of three forums dealing with families and digital media usage, organized in cooperation with the University of Salzburg. The Committee also published its online quarterly bulletin, “Families international”, incorporating forum proceedings, with a focus on endeavours to eliminate the practice of child marriage.” <http://undocs.org/A/75/61>

#### 4. Website of the Committee

[www.viennafamilycommittee.org](http://www.viennafamilycommittee.org)

This website, which was set up in 2000 is, amongst others, the main vehicle to publish our quarterly bulletin ‘Families International’. Issues Nos.113 to 116, which were published in 2020, may be downloaded from our website without cost to the reader. A button entitled ‘Families Online’ is available on the homepage with a direct link to the proceedings of three International Forums organised by the Committee, between 2017 and 2019, dealing with families and digital media usage.

#### 5. The Three Digital Networks of the Committee [203 CSOs Networked - 92 in Sub-Saharan Africa]

A so-called ‘**Digital Divide**’ exists between those connected and not connected to the Internet. Statistics from the United Nations International Telecommunications Union based in Geneva, for 2019, show that just over 50% of the World’s present population of over 7 billion was connected, for the first time, to the world-wide-web. However, in the continent of Africa alone, 72% of the population was offline. Further, the proportion of women using the internet globally is 48%, compared to 55% percent of men.

92 CSOs, or 45.3% of the total, of 203 CSOs in the three Digital Networks, set up and maintained by the Committee, are based in Sub-Saharan Africa, which is particularly affected by the ‘Digital Divide’. These 92 CSOs offer important knowledge resources for the well-being of families, especially in the first 1000 days of a child’s life, which are so important for its future development, as UNESCO pointed out in 2014. These digital knowledge networks expand the concept of Civil Society being an advocacy and discourse entity, to also being a resource entity, especially of knowledge.

[www.10yearsIYF.org](http://www.10yearsIYF.org)

This website continues to experience interest, as a digital network, and also as a resource archive for the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family (IYF) in 2004, with many relevant links to other sources. It resulted out of the participation of the then Chairperson of the Committee in a consultative meeting of twenty international and regional Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) set up by the United Nations Secretariat in New York, in 2002, to implement a resolution of the United Nations General Assembly to observe the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the International Year of the Family (IYF) in 2004. There it was agreed to prepare a study, under the chairmanship of the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family on: ‘Contributions of Civil Society Organisations to the Well-Being of Families’ since 1994. The original study, in which thirty two CSOs, from eighteen countries in five continents participated, was also published in book form with the financial support of the United Nations Trust Fund on Family Activities in 1994, under the title: ‘Documenting Contributions of Civil Society Organisations to the Well-Being of Families’ and edited by P. Crowley, who presented the study at a meeting of the United Nations in New York, to observe the United Nations International Day of Families on May 15<sup>th</sup> 2004. The book was also submitted to the members of the special session of the 59<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the United Nations on Dec. 6<sup>th</sup> 2004, to observe the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the International Year of the Family.

The United Nations Secretary General referred to the above publication in his Report to the 59<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly (A/59/176, 2004). The contents of the book, which also includes a comparative perspective of international, national, and local families-oriented civil society organisations enhancing social justice, are also available to download at [www.10yearsIYF.org](http://www.10yearsIYF.org)

[www.20yearsIYF.org](http://www.20yearsIYF.org)

To facilitate the implementation of an update of the above-mentioned study, originally carried out at [www.10yearsIYF.org](http://www.10yearsIYF.org) a further website was set up by the Committee at [www.20yearsIYF.org](http://www.20yearsIYF.org) to gather data entered by the twenty-eight participating CSOs, from seventeen countries in four continents. This network now further offers a knowledge resource on family issues for visitors to the website, by creating a so-called 'Cyber Street' of websites of families-oriented CSOs, which deal with eight categories relevant for families: 'Children; Economic-Financial; Education; Gender; Health Issues; Organisation; Parents; and Subsistence-Services.' This website is also a further digital network and includes a series of links, inter alia, to the United Nations Focal Point on the Family in New York.

[www.civilsocietynetworks.org](http://www.civilsocietynetworks.org)

An Interactive-Internet-Forum for civil society organisations world-wide, including local, national and international CSOs, as well as academic and research institutions, was set up at the request of many organisations from around the globe, and went online in August 2004 at [www.civilsocietynetworks.org](http://www.civilsocietynetworks.org) This Network had 143 member organisations from 25 countries in 2020 having incorporated the Interactive-Forums the Committee had originally set up with civil society organisations in Eastern African and in Central and Eastern European Countries, between 2000 and 2004, and then extended and opened up, as a further digital network, to worldwide membership in 2004. Civil Society Organisations worldwide can join, and participate in this Forum, free of cost, by contacting the Committee at: [contact@viennafamilycommittee.org](mailto:contact@viennafamilycommittee.org)

Each organisation receives an individual User-Identity and Password and is able to enter and change data as necessary. The Forum also includes a discussion board, internal e-mail and online conference facilities, as well as a newsletter function, for each individual member organisation of the network.

The above outlined facts and figures, reflect perhaps, the ever-increasing interest generated by issues relating to families and also speak for themselves, with regard to the continued and increasing endeavours worldwide of the Committee, which observed in 2020 the 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of its inception in 1985.

## **6. The Members of the Board of the Committee for 2019 - 2022**

Board Officers:

Chairperson: Wolfgang Engelmaier, M.A. Kolping International,

Secretary: Peter Crowley, Ph.D., International Council of Psychologists,

Treasurer: Alexandra Lugert, M.A., European Union of Women

Board Members:

Julia Birner, Families International,

Christin Kohler M.A., Families International,

Karin Kuzmanov B.A., B.A., Families International,

Oscar McConkie, Latter Day Saints Charities,

Isabella Nening M.A., Families International,

Franziska Reichel, Committee Coordinator,

United Nations Commission for Social Development,

Dr. Eleonora Teixeira Da Costa Rossoll,

Federation of Catholic Family Associations.

Dr. Maria Riehl, Women's Federation for World Peace,

**Vienna NGO Committee on the Family**

[www.viennafamilycommittee.org](http://www.viennafamilycommittee.org)

**January 2021**

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**Secretary: Peter Crowley, Ph.D.**

**Chairperson: Wolfgang Engelmaier, M.A.**



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Email: [contact@viennafamilycommittee.org](mailto:contact@viennafamilycommittee.org)

**FULL COMMITTEE MEETING**

UNITED NATIONS  
VIENNA INTERNATIONAL CENTRE

**Monday May 10<sup>th</sup> 2021**

UNITED NATIONS  
**INTERNATIONAL DAY OF FAMILIES 2021**  
**RESCHEDULED INTERNATIONAL FORUM**

13.00 – 15.00

[Including Discussion with Presenter & Participants]

**“STATUS of FOOD & NUTRITION in EUROPE & CENTRAL ASIA -  
CHALLENGES and ACTIONS”**

**Mary Kenny M.A.**

Mary Kenny is a Food Safety and Consumer Protection Officer at the Food and Agricultural Office of the United Nations Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (REU) in Budapest, and has extensive experience in working with countries to strengthen national food control programmes and related food safety capacities. Mary also manages FAO’s work in the region on agri-food trade and market integration, including work on nutrition and sustainable food systems. Mary has a Degree in Environmental Health Officer and a Masters in Food Science and Technology.

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Dr. Maria Riehl, Women’s Federation for World Peace International.



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The presentation will highlight a regional perspective of Europe and Central Asia on food and nutrition security, where there are still pockets of malnutrition, including micronutrient deficiencies and growing levels of obesity. In addition to an update on the status, some of the causes and potential solutions, and links to food systems, including the role of women, men, families, communities, will be discussed. Different nutritional needs of family members will also be highlighted.

Following the International Forum there will be an  
Administrative Session of the  
Full Committee Meeting  
15.30 - 17.00

This International Forum was originally scheduled to be held in May 2020, but because of the Covid-19 Pandemic, it had to be cancelled, and was rescheduled for May this year. If however it is again not possible to be held in the United Nations Vienna International Centre, because of continued health concerns, it will then be held as a Zoom Video Conference, similar to the one we held, for the last Full Committee Meeting and International Forum, with Prof. Mary Flynn, also on the theme of Nutrition, last October. It is planned to publish the proceedings of both of these International Forums, on the theme of Nutrition, together in the issue of Families International, due for online publication in June 2021.

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Federation of Catholic Family Associations,  
Dr. Maria Riehl, Women's Federation for World Peace International

**Statements to the Commission for Social Development**

United Nations

**E/CN.5/2021/NGO/18**



**Economic and Social Council**

Distr.: General  
30 October 2020

English only

**Commission for Social Development**

**Fifty-ninth session**

8–17 February 2021

**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the  
twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: Priority**

**Theme: Socially just transition towards sustainable  
development: the role of digital technologies on social  
development and well-being of all**

**Statement submitted by International Council of Women,  
International Kolping Society, Latter-Day Saint Charities, non-  
governmental organizations in consultative status with the  
Economic and Social Council\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

We recognize that sustainable social development requires a holistic approach, that emphasizes the integration of economic and social policy, while enhancing human rights, gender equality and environmental sustainability, and are aware that it can lead to genuine lasting and sustainable improvements in human well-being.

We are further aware, that the post-Rio de Janeiro Summit on Sustainable Development in 1992, and the post Copenhagen Era, with the World Summit for Social Development in 1995, have both given impetus to transformative social development that develops structures and deals not just with symptoms, or a web of safety nets, particularly in an increasingly globalised world. Various United Nations agencies, studies and reports could lead to the conclusion that sustainable change and development, can only be lasting, with the inclusion of an inclusive social perspective.

As a consequence, Sustainable Social Development is both environment sensitive and human sensitive, guided by human rights, and could further greatly benefit from the continued integration of issues relating, not only to individuals, but also to families and the communities they live in.

In a global health crisis, such as we are currently experiencing, the need for both a holistic and systemic approach, encompassing synergies of social and technological transformation, have been given increased impetus. Natural disasters, such as fire, flooding and water shortages, which we are also currently experiencing, further draw our attention to the need for critical, secure and resilient infrastructures, which are also capable of dealing with such natural disasters.

We are becoming increasingly aware of the positive role digital technology is playing in social development, such as broadband connectivity. Multiple international studies already show the benefits of progress in reaching the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals and their one hundred and sixty-nine targets, set by the global community in the United Nations, and document that the online sector has also already been contributing towards increasing progress, across all Goals. This has further enabled national efforts to develop knowledge economies, leading to digital transformation in government services, offering greater value for citizens.

We are however also mindful, that 2019 was the first year that more than fifty percent of the world's population, of over seven billion, was online, with access to the world-wide-web. Further, the proportion of women using the internet globally is forty eight percent, compared to fifty eight percent of men, pointing to a gender inequality. The International Telecommunication Union, which is the United Nations specialized agency for information and communication technologies, also however documents that three point six billion, or forty six percent of the world population, continued to be without online access in 2019, particularly in least developed countries, despite the fact that ninety three percent of the global population is within reach of mobile broadband. This has become known as the Digital Divide. In the present ongoing global health emergency, the introduction of digital technology in the educational sector is also becoming increasingly evident, in a number of countries. These measures can further contribute to increasing sustainable social development, especially with the accessibility to open source knowledge resources. However, this in turn, can lead to an acceleration of the so-called Educational Divide, already in evidence by the fact that about two hundred and fifty eight million children and youth, were out of school world-wide in 2018, without access to acquiring digital capabilities and skills, including the safe use of the internet, the ability to deal with malicious mobile applications, possible sexual harassment or mobbing in social media.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization reminds us how important the first one thousand days of a child's life, from conception to its second birthday are, for its long-term development and well-being. We are further aware, that the education of a child's parents, especially with regard to nutrition, is critical in this phase. The foundation for the parents' development and well-being was also set in their own first one thousand days. Education could hence be regarded as the best guarantee for this cycle to function. Each family is, in its own right, also a micro educational knowledge resource, perhaps quite wealthy in cumulative emotional knowledge resources, and social competencies and skills. These factors could make their members aware of the need to appreciate, cultivate and treasure the various natural resources available to them, and their fellow human beings, which are vital for environmental sustainability and the well-being of all. Hence, Education for Sustainable Social Inclusion, in fact begins within a family setting, and not just when a child begins its school years. Education per se, including those first steps in education acquired in the family setting, could be regarded as a passport to meaningful participation and influence in creating an inclusive social and sustainable society, for the well-being of all.

We hence recommend a renewed, increased, and concerted global approach to reducing and avoiding, both the Digital Divide and the Educational Divide, by increased and sustainable capacity building of both communication and educational infrastructures by governments, which in turn can lead to the empowerment of individuals, families and communities.

The failure to take cognisance of a families-focused approach to national and international co-operation for sustainable social development could endanger losing the input of a sphere of partners, directly involved in the intricate day-to-day problems, affecting and shaping society.

Finally, we trust that preparations for the thirtieth anniversary of the United Nations International Year of the Family in 2024 will re-emphasise the permanence of issues relating to families in the work and programmes of the Commission for Social Development, and continue to recognise families as the fundamental cornerstone of society, just as numerous United Nations conferences have done, since the Rio de Janeiro Summit in 1992.

United Nations

E/CN.5/2021/NGO/8



## Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
30 October 2020

English only

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### Commission for Social Development

**Fifty-ninth session**

8–17 February 2021

**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the  
twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: Priority**

**Theme: Socially just transition towards sustainable  
development: the role of digital technologies on social  
development and well-being of all.**

### **Statement submitted by the International Federation for Family Development, non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

### Families and the Challenges of the Digital Transformation

During times of great damage, children are most likely to endure harmful consequences on a wide range of aspects: health development – both physical and mental – , social integration and so on. Researchers from the Research on Improving Systems of Education program studied how disasters were affecting children, investigating the consequences of the earthquake that hit Pakistan in 2005. They found out that children who were younger than 3 at the time of the earthquake were significantly smaller in height than non-affected children (3 cm on average) in 2009, highlighting the long-term consequences on health that great natural disasters could have on children.

The COVID-19 crisis has led many governments to close schools. The scope of consequences is yet to be observed but it is already obvious that many children will bitterly bear those costs. Was it necessary to close school? Probably. Closing schools in the past slowed the spread of epidemic diseases, and thus saved lives. But the effectiveness of such measures ultimately depends on how deadly the virus turns out to be in the future and the actual accessibility of an internet connection.

Forthcoming consequences are inevitable. But even as of now the virus is affecting children in many ways. Most of the problems raised here are intertwined, and their intensity depends on how much those factors are gathered. In spite of that two situations might help sketch the rationale of the concerns for children: school closures and family care.

#### New technologies and child development

There has never been a consensus about the best approach to take on schools throughout this pandemic; especially at its beginning, when nobody had a clear opinion on whether schools should close or not. But as of March 31st, UNESCO estimated that 91.3% of total enrolled learners – 1,5 billion students over the globe – were affected by those measures.

Most countries recognize children's right to education according to the Article 28 of the CRC. Undisrupted education made therefore distance learning compulsory. Technology offers tremendous opportunities for it, so that it goes way beyond a rescue option. Intelligent online learning systems can adapt to every child, making the learning experience fit to their personal needs. State institutions and non - governmental organizations have been very creative in dealing with those new and unprecedented challenges. UNESCO published a list of applications and websites, created to face said challenge in matter of education using internet, but also, in a broader way, of all distance learning platforms, including non -internet-based resources.

“That being said, the Covid-19 crisis strikes at a point when most of the education systems covered by the OECD's latest round of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) are not ready for the world of digital learning opportunities.” People across the globe do not have equal access to distance learning resources for many different reasons, and the pandemic has highlighted those inequalities and deepened them. Mainly there are great differences among countries on the availability of information and communication technology (ICT) at home, which mainly relies on income issues but also sometimes on the number of children at home using such devices. Access to Internet is not equally available everywhere either. This is the reason why some alternative non - internet-based solutions had been

set, but at a broader scale, access to and availability of effective -distance learning platforms is not well and equally spread around the world.

There is therefore a great work of monitoring children to be provided on the part of both state institutions and teachers. UNESCO gave some recommendations to make this task more homogeneous. First of all, remote supervision has to be provided — distance learning does not mean alone learning.

This implies that assessments have to be upheld and adjusted. Assessments can obviously not be carried out the way they used to, but they give children both an aim to keep learning during those tough times and “information about [their] progress for families and teachers. The loss of this information delays the recognition of both high-potential and learning difficulties and can have harmful long -term consequences for the child.”

Regular supervision is essential to the learning process of children. If we take into account the fact that “the percentage of children who cannot read and understand at age 10 – stood at 53% of children in low- and middle-income countries — before the outbreak started.” we might rightfully dread the forthcoming education outcomes of the crisis if no fast measures are taken. This emphasizes the need for public policies – and for teachers on a smaller scale – to endeavour- supporting disadvantaged groups.

However, research has repeatedly found that fully virtual classes are much less effective than traditional face-to-face instruction, due to the inherent limitedness of that environment with regard to interaction between teachers and students, and to the latter’s capacity to focus during a long period behind a screen. This makes more likely school dropouts and lesser work in the process of learning, which is going to have an impact on test scores.

Moreover, school closure may not only impact learning outcomes, but also child development. “School is not only about instruction [...] the role of schools is actually far richer and more complex, and involves developing a wider set of knowledge, so young people learn about the society they are part of, their culture and develop a sense of self. This cannot be achieved solely through the delivery of digital content. ” Teenagers are at an age where their development depends on the relationship they have with their peers, more than that with their family. Therefore, many of them live the crisis as “an injunction to regression.” And even where schools reopened, sanitary prevention measures make social relationships somewhat harder.

There are also mental health issues to be faced as a result of the lockdown, as another report of the United Nations has shown. Many children’s emotional state and behaviour has been affected during confinement according to reports by Italian and Spanish parents. Moreover, children, including adolescents, are at particular risk of abuse during the pandemic. Children with disabilities, children in crowded settings and those who live and work on the streets are particularly vulnerable. A UN Policy Brief on the impact of COVID-19 on children has been published specifically on this topic with recommendations on how to address children’s risks and needs.

Adolescents and young people are also an at -risk group; they have seen their futures impacted. A study carried out with young people with a history of mental health needs living in the UK reports that 32% of them agreed that the pandemic had made their mental health much worse. The main sources of distress included concerns about their family’s health, school and university closures, loss of routine and loss of social connection. Provision of mental health services must include specific actions tailored for this population.

### **Parenting education and unpaid care**

From the results of the study in Pakistan, researchers drew a simple conclusion: “we must make governments and aid agencies recognize that the trade -off between investing in human capital and immediate aid is a false one.” Responses to the crisis cannot exclusively rely on cash transfers or other kinds of immediate -effect policy. They have to take into account the primary environment of children: families.

The pandemic crisis highlighted the crucial role of families in dealing with disasters. Families have proven to adapt wonderfully to this unprecedented situation. They are the place where people look for shelter because they have the ability to mitigate the negative impacts of crises. However, some obstacles might alter this capacity.

The first thing families have had to do is reorganizing their time and schedule. Parents were told to stay home and some of them could while others couldn't, because their job was an essential one. In any case, the closing of schools made things a lot more complex for parents. In fact, for those who had to work outside, nobody was there to look after their kids. And homeworking has not been a family picnic either.

Family has a great role to play in the instruction of children and provides major inputs into a child's learning. However, they often rely on schools for this; families usually only provide additional support. Home schooling can be a good experience, but only if families are prepared to it, which is not the case in most of them. Here again, the crisis has deepened inequalities. Reorganization of parent's time had to be very logistical too: 9% of 15-year-old students do not have a quiet place to study in their homes. Moreover, the share of ICT might have been an additional difficulty, especially in large families.

Effective distance learning also depends on both non -cognitive skills of the parents and of their amount of knowledge. The Pakistani aforementioned study, it has been found that children with educated mothers did not feel losses on educational outcomes, but children whose mother had not completed primary education did.

But education was not the only challenge families had to face. They were put under a tough financial pressure. Some low -income families relied on school to provide their children with free meals. Many creative ideas have been set to mitigate this negative outcome of the crisis, but once more it was not the case equally everywhere.

Actually, many childcare services could not be carried out anymore because of the lock down, with harmful consequences on children's health and wellbeing. Special emphasis was put on physical and emotional maltreatment at home (abused children were locked home with their abuser), on gender-based violence and on psychological distress (due to lack of social interaction, anxiety, death of relatives, etc.). Also lack of Internet monitoring exposed children to online sexual predators.

Sometimes, in low-income countries, children were put under the pressure to drop out of school, to support financially the family. “As the pandemic wreaks havoc on family incomes, without support, many could resort to child labour, ” said ILO Di-rector-General, Guy Ryder.

### **Conclusion**

The current crisis is affecting children in an unprecedented way. If no specific measures are taken, the burden of those consequences is going to rely on children. This is why it is essential to plan policies ahead, so that the lessons learnt are taken into account to promote news ways to improve learning, but without increasing the burden of parents or, at least, helping them to bear it in better conditions.

This words of the Secretary-General's statement on the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on children can be a good conclusion to reach this objective — “we must commit to building back better by using the recovery from COVID -19 to pursue a more sustainable and inclusive economy and society in line with the Sustainable Development Goals. With the pandemic placing so many of the world’s children in jeopardy, I reiterate my urgent appeal: let us protect our children and safeguard their well-being.”

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### Commission for Social Development

Fifty-ninth session

8–17 February 2021

**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the  
twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority**

**Theme: Socially just transition towards sustainable  
development: the role of digital technologies on social  
development and well-being of all**

### **Statement submitted by the International Federation for Home Economics, non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



The International Federation for Home Economics is the only global organization representing Home Economics and related fields. Home economists maintain that homes are environments where individuals reach their full potential, live a life of dignity, and develop and express their global and local interdependence. Inclusion in the innovation of digital technologies and expanded ownership and accessibility is essential to women and their families' well-being because giving and receiving communication is a fundamental human right and paramount to human flourishing.

Strong partnerships and policies promoting gender equality are essential to a socially just implementation of digital technologies that foster and protect well-being for women and their families. While massive strides in knowledge sharing programs have been made, many depend heavily on technology intensive hardware, platforms and infrastructure that are not accessible in an equal manner, creating a uniquely feminized aspect to the digital divide.

The continual innovation of digital technology has produced valuable gains for human welfare, however both the pace of the innovation and the failure to include women and their concerns at the forefront of this innovation means that access to digital technology will not be provided through the simple extension of high-speed internet or cellular infrastructure. Despite the best efforts of the global community, some women, families, and communities could spend the rest of their lives on the far side of the digital divide and policy and partnership efforts should be made to reach and support them. Ensuring that innovation does not lead to the premature abandonment of technologies that are most accessible to the majority of women and families will require a strengthening of partnerships between non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and policymakers. To this end, the International Federation for Home Economics is calling on Member States and those in civil society who share a focus on communication in everyday living for health and well-being of women and families to strengthen partnerships and sharpen the focus on access to digital technology. We propose the following efforts which apply to all Sustainable Development Goals but highlights Goal 5, Gender Equality, and Goal 17, Partnerships to Achieve the Goal.

Women are significantly underrepresented in the production and consumption of digital technologies, therefore significant opportunities and highly functional products are inaccessible to them. Few women, if any at all in some areas, participate in the innovation, manufacturing or leadership of communication infrastructure or devices. As such, women are denied both full and effective participation in political and economic aspects of technology changes and expansion. Limited involvement in opportunities created by digital technology is not the only barrier to access women face. Systems and devices are made without consideration for the needs and desires of female end-users seeking enhancements to daily living. Unlike industrial technologies, digital technologies can be considered household technology and in a sharp turn from previous eras of household technology development and implementation, which included input from professional home economists and the people they serve, the development of digital technology has failed to put the needs of women, families and communities at the heart of the effort. Knowledge sharing devices and access to timely, reliable information are important tools in everyday life and in domestic work. Digital devices need to be equally distributed without reference to gender or family status. Empowering women through access to their own digital devices, they and their families will be offered all the opportunity that comes with this ownership, for example, access to education, communication, reporting, health care, and more. Ownership of digital technologies would allow women to explore and create their worlds from their own homes, meaning women's identity development, self-concept, and dignity would not be limited by geographic location and other

characteristics relevant in national contexts. Data protection and the necessity of data commodity should be legally managed in a fair and just system that specifically includes and protects women. Both infrastructure and content should be developed according to the aspirations of women who, through geographic location, economic or educational status or discrimination are currently not able to adopt the latest technologies or join in an equal manner in technology mediated communication.

Many women lose access to digital technology through the premature abandonment of infrastructure and systems conducted without consideration of those being pushed across the divide by upgrades that make previous formats obsolete. Pushing essential public services, such as healthcare and education, into new systems without adequate planning for those who will be unable to access them due to discrimination, economic inequality or lack of education creates injustice. The COVID-19 pandemic brought this concern into stark focus. Across the world, large numbers of women have struggled to support and protect their families without access to the digital devices and services that have been the refuge of the more fortunate. What was once a luxury became, overnight, a necessity. Market forces understandably drive the development of digital technology used in households, however strong partnerships are needed to assert the rights of women and their families to technologies that benefit themselves beyond facilitating consumption.

Global and local organizations from Member States must develop and look for partnerships to address all feminized aspects of the digital divide in global, national, and local settings. At all levels, policymakers, financial institutions, investors, and governments should expand existing visions, strategic plans and accountability programs to include women. These efforts should include an accessibility evaluation, much like that conducted for sustainability impact, that calculates how the proposals to upgrade digital technology will support continued access by those members of society, especially women, who will not be in a position to benefit from the upgrade immediately. Besides a focus on accountability in programs that seek to upgrade digital technology, strong partnerships must be formed to identify and mobilize targeted financial resources for initiatives that promote and report successes and opportunities for improvement and for the inclusion of women in all levels of infrastructure design, development, implementation, and evaluation. Global and local agencies must establish and seek out innovation and research partnerships that include women in science and technology programs. Many innovations that help meet the needs of women and their families have yet to be identified because they do not have equal access to the centers of innovation. For example, Femtech start-ups and its early stage of funding should be encouraged to motivate the creativity of technology. Inclusion of content such as menstrual cycle tracking and breast milk monitoring on smartphones is an example of the type of innovation that has a clear benefit for women but is not widely available or accessible. Investments in capacity-building education for women should be established along with accountability reports and celebrations of successes. Efforts in this capacity-building education should be made outside of the formal education system, in recognition that many women leave formal education early and require personal or household access to education for daily living throughout their lives. As the United Nations continues to reform knowledge sharing by improving the coordination of existing infrastructure and systems, women should be viewed as essential in global technology discussions and decision-making. All social, political, and economic barriers should be removed in order to allow for women to develop, manage, and otherwise benefit from products and markets of digital technologies. Education and economic incentives should be promoted to mitigate all feminized aspects of the digital divide. With unique knowledge and experience, women from varied backgrounds, ages, economic classes, race, and spiritual beliefs should be embraced in all levels of governance for the enrichment, efficiency, and effectiveness of public, private-public, and civil society partnerships

that aim to discover, produce, and manage renewable energy resources for digital technologies.

The International Federation for Home Economics offers this statement in the context of and with the hope for the attainment of the all of the Sustainable Development Goals and their related targets, with particular emphasis on: Goal 5, Gender Equality and Goal 17, Partnerships to Achieve the Goal. We sincerely thank the Commission for Social Development for the opportunity to work toward the realization of our mutual aims of universal peace, human rights as all Member States have agreed to, and larger freedom for our entire human family by resolving widespread, feminized inaccessibility in the development and usage of digital technologies that are required for individual, household, and universal well-being.

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### **Commission for Social Development**

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**Theme: Socially just transition towards sustainable  
development: the role of digital technologies on social  
development and well-being of all**

### **Statement submitted by Make Mothers Matter, a non- governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

### **Digital technologies: instrument to increase mother's capacities and to reduce gaps**

Make Mothers Matter (MMM) oversees a network of more than 40 grassroots organizations, working in some 30 countries around the world, to support and empower mothers and their families and to advance the human rights of women and children. On the 59th Session of the UN Commission on Social Development, MMM would like to draw attention to the role of digital technology in mothers' lives. If technology helps to improve people's quality of life, it can also create inequalities. The challenge is that digital technology should be a lever to improving the social development of communities and the realization of SDGs for all.

Digital technology has transformed societies and economies. Technological advances in health, artificial intelligence, finance, and social media opened new ways to communicate, created new changes and opened new types of employment. Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have helped to improve the quality of life for families in remote areas. Mobile technology reduces costly landlines and gives automatic access to health, education and financial services, which help increase inclusiveness. Digital infrastructure provides energy -saving solutions and improved wellbeing for many women, such as the innovations to help mothers and children obtain clean water in safe conditions. Another example is the practice of medicine and health supported by mobile devices known as mHealth, such as "Mamans Mobiles contre le Malaria au Mali (MAMMA)" which helped reduce malaria mortality in Africa. This app collects data and communicates with health centers to monitor and treat families. Also, in India, digital technologies help to fight against maternal mortality and malnutrition, the Society for the Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERPT) has created one mobile device to increase communication between village-level and community workers. Additionally, digital technologies help provide access to financial services, many women can have access to their own money beyond gender burden. In another sector, ICT has helped support humanitarian action, they help coordinate better the actions in emergency situations, e.g. Digital cash in Somalia helps refugees to have access to buy the food and water. Digital technology also improves access, data collection, and monitoring to help in the realization of SDG Goals.

Unfortunately, many of those benefits remain in developing countries or in small sectors of the populations... ITC also opens the way to new inequalities or increases existing inequalities. "While technology brings productivity gains, for instance, it can also erect hurdles for individuals and societies. For all its promise, technological innovation is already creating winners and losers" (UN World Social Report 2020). In most of the cases, access to technology is linked to pre -existed infrastructures, such as electricity. Even though the electrification cost has been accelerating last years, UN estimated 850 million people without this service. The contrast is bigger between urban and rural areas; rural areas were home to 45 per cent of the world's population in 2018 (UN Habitat). Even though many people live in cities and have access to electricity, access to technology is not guaranteed, by lack of affordable internet networks, mobile phones and laptops, thus fueling inequalities. Disparities of education, income and gender also increase this disparity. Technological divide is a real issue, as UN General Secretary quotes "It is threatening to become the new face of inequality, reinforcing the social and economic disadvantages suffered by women and girls, people with disabilities and minorities of all kinds".

Technological divide underpins the gap of access to ICT, especially for women who often are more impacted by social, economic, and cultural burdens, together with

gender digital divide. Access to ICT is very much related to gender barriers. In 2020 4.1 billion people have access to technology. However only 48% of women use internet. Furthermore, in 2020 UN statistics show that 130 million girls worldwide are not in school, 9.5 million girls globally are excluded to secondary school (Drive for 5). In many countries in the global south, boys' education is prioritized over girls. Other barriers such as economic issues, marriage and social norms also hold girls, women and mothers back. Countless girls around the world help their mothers at home rather than go to school. As the Secretary -General pointed out "social and institutional barriers still discourage girls from taking up careers based on science, technology, engineering and mathematics." So much still needs to be done to improve digital technology and to leave no woman or girl behind.

We here wish to spotlight that to attain a sustainable development in technologies, it must be encompassed in a much broader cross -cutting vision based on a threefold perspective including technological innovation, environmental issues and human issues: ethos, education and development. We have in mind an MMM member in Bangladesh, Friendship, an NGO, operating in remote areas to support marginalized populations. Their response in the pandemic doubled with extreme climatic conditions is exemplary and illustrates that inclusiveness of many issues and stakeholders is key to obtain tangible results.

For many years, they have partnered with an important French electricity firm to install solar lighting systems in these regions and enable families and schools to access to ICT – and education. When the pandemic arrived, combined with floods and the Cyclon Amphan, they switched on ITC to full regime using state channels for broadcast where internet was still available, the government education portal and an intensive flow of personalized contacts between the teachers and students and families to make sure no one was left behind. Fueling remote schooling is paramount: 108 248 phone calls and more than 202 000 home visits helped to maintain the level of education.

Fostering a social network infused with solidarity, honesty and generosity is one other element. All the Friendship programs are infused with the transmission of these values. Therefore, students were better prepared to face the 2020 crisis, participating in a foodbank initiative for instance and contributing towards an overall wellbeing of their own community. At the outcome of the crisis, these young people who benefit from Friendship's educational support will have progressed academically but also will have been enriched as human beings and citizens capable of commitment for their communities.

Targeting youth with ITC, both boys and girls is vital because they are the citizens of tomorrow. Let us not forget the important role of mothers who nurture and care, whose educational role is vital in early childhood and who must not be left on the side of the road either. In both developed and developing countries, women also assume the majority of unpaid domestic and care work, often juggling paid work and family responsibilities, to the detriment of their personal aspirations, their economic independence, and even their health. The 2019 evaluation of SDG 5, Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, showed that in 90 countries for which data is available, women devote on average three times more hours a day to unpaid care and domestic work than men, which limits the time available for paid work, education and leisure. The Covid-19 crisis has exacerbated this situation. In families with children, mothers, much more than fathers, have seen the time they devote to childcare increase during the lockdown. Millions of families struggle with the use of technology and many of families do not have access to technology to continue the education of children. Big cities like New York are the example of this situation, the situation is catastrophic for almost 114,000 homeless students who living in shelters or in overcrowded apartments and are unable to have access to devices or the internet

to do online learning. Many countries, like Mexico and Somalia, tried to close the gaps with the use of radio and television, however many people in rural areas have limited access to infrastructures.

The Covid-19 crisis has highlighted the importance of digital technology and caused a rise of the use of health systems, technologies, telecommuting and remote learning. On the other hand, the Coronavirus crisis is having a cruel worldwide loop effect on digital technologies inequalities.

In this particular context MMM calls on governments and stakeholders to:

- Take action: Covid-19 and its economic devastation offers a unique opportunity to promote digital technology for well-being, to utilize them in the promotion of education of girls as a capital investment for development.
- Ensure remote learning for all. Promote the creation of policies of affordable internet for all. Help children to continue their formal education even though the pandemic. Education and care which must not be considered as expenses but high return investments.
- Connect technology for mothers around the world. Expand access to Mobile Health (mHealth) to expand access to reproductive, maternal, newborn, and child Health (RMNCH). Like the Early Childhood Peace Consortium pointed out, Mobile health (mHealth) innovations support health service functions such as health promotion, emergency medical response, data collection, point-of-care diagnostics, and clinical guidance.
- Support parents in their caring responsibilities thanks to digital technologies.
- Implement policies to reduce technological divide and address the objectives of the Agenda 2030 in a cross-cutting inclusive approach encompassing innovation, environmental issues and human issues for sustainable social development.
- Provide quality education for all. The importance of education underpins all human achievements, including care work. Education policies correlate with care policies with positive outcomes in society and countries as a whole.

The pandemic starkly challenges the choices that societies will have to make to build a future and how this can be achieved. UN Secretary General pointed “we are at a turning point. We urgently need to harness the infinite opportunities offered by digital technology in order to scale up our efforts on health care, on the climate crisis, on eradicating poverty and across all the Sustainable Development Goals.” Digital technologies to reduce gaps and create effectiveness, must be harnessed to the goal of providing inclusive better education systems encompassing the well-being of families and mothers particularly who are at front as well. For the well-being and development of society, the technological divide must be reduced to improve education and motherhood.

*From the United Nations*

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**Seventy-sixth 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 2021**  
**Social and human rights questions: social**  
**development**

**Implementation of the objectives of the International Year  
of the Family and its follow-up processes**

**Report of the Secretary-General**

This 18 page Report of the United Nations Secretary-General contains a number of pages of:

**Appropriate ways and means to observe the thirtieth  
anniversary of the International Year of the Family, 2024**

Readers of Family International had been encouraged in 2020, by the Secretariat of the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family, to contribute their recommendations, to the survey carried out by the United Nations Focal Point on the Family, of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, for themes and issues, that could be dealt with in 2024, to prepare for, and observe IYF+30 in 2024.

The full text of the Secretary-Generals Report is available at: <http://undocs.org/A/76/61>

From the World Bank

Public Disclosure Authorized



## POVERTY & EQUITY NOTES

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### Supporting Job Search for Mauritian Youth with Little Education

Jorge Luis Castaneda, Isis Gaddis, Marco Ranzani, and Joana Sousa Lourenço

*Boosting shared prosperity also means including disadvantaged groups in the labor market. While many factors can hinder labor force participation, behavioral factors have emerged as key barriers in the case of Mauritian youth with little education. This Note describes the results of an intervention that delivered training on job search, goal setting, and planning skills to a group of young job-seekers with low educational attainment in Mauritius. While the intervention had to be interrupted due to the COVID-19 outbreak, preliminary results show encouraging positive impacts for youth employability and job search behaviors, and point to useful lessons.*

**Mauritius has one of the strongest economies in Africa.** Over recent decades, it has achieved an extraordinary structural transformation, steady economic growth, and poverty reduction, but economic success has recently fallen short of expectations in terms of both growth and shared prosperity. In addition, Mauritius' population is aging rapidly, and the labor force is shrinking. Mauritius will therefore need to pursue a new growth model to reignite productivity growth and employ more people to make them less dependent on fiscal redistribution.

**Mauritian youth show significantly lower than average labor force participation rates.** Out of about 351,000 youth ages 16–35, 21 percent are not in education, employment, or training (NEET) and almost 70 percent of NEET youth are women. About 39 percent of NEET youth have at best completed primary education, and this typically accompanies poor living standards. About 74 percent of NEET youth with low levels of education are living in households in the bottom 40 percent, and about 30 percent are living in poor households. Disengaged youth miss the opportunity to develop at an age that is crucial for future social and economic outcomes, and are exposed to economic vulnerability, social marginalization, and violence.

**This Note illustrates the design and implementation of a behavioral intervention and discusses key findings from the first phase of implementation.**<sup>1</sup> The World Bank designed and began implementing a behavioral intervention to support Mauritian youth with little education, in cooperation with the Mauritius Employment Services Division of the Ministry of Labour, Human Resources Development, and Training.

#### Intervention Design

**The intervention provided job-seekers with in-person training, and a 20-minute phone call “boost” 4 to 5 weeks after the training.** The training focused on building effective job search skills, such as goal setting and planning, while the boost focused on motivation and mentoring. The decision to include the phone-call “boost” responded to the suspension of the intervention due to the COVID-19 lockdown.

**Training in job search skills:** The training included 3 main components: (a) the job search journey, providing simplified templates of reference letters and résumés that were easy to navigate; (b) training to promote goal setting and the use of planning tools (Figure 1); (c) a job search primer, in the form of an

<sup>1</sup> The full study is available for download at <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/582261592536259683/>.

Public Disclosure Authorized

information leaflet providing data on local labor market conditions, resources, and tips.

**Job search journey:** The diagnostic analysis found that many youth lacked job application experience, and were uncertain about documentation, steps, channels, and duration of the process of looking for employment. Thus, the training aimed at guiding youth through the process and supporting them in setting realistic expectations and persevering. The initial activity described the job search journey, including main steps, requirements, potential difficulties, and possible outcomes. The presentation then focused on 2 main documents: the reference letters and the CV. The activity sought to motivate and guide participants to fill out simplified templates for these documents (available in the booklet) to use when applying for jobs.

**Training in goal setting and planning:** Fieldwork before the training identified the lack of soft skills key for effective job search, namely goal setting and planning, as well as lack of achievable and realistic aspirations. The training included several main components, leveraging insights from behavioral science: simplification, implementation intentions, commitment devices, and the concept of “making it social” (instead of individual). Job-seekers were invited to set specific weekly job search goals in terms of number of hours spent searching, identifying opportunities, and sending applications. They also created weekly job search plans. Training provided a weekly planning tool, a template structuring each activity into “what, when, where, and how”, and participants received a checklist on job search channels. Job-seekers signed a commitment statement on their weekly goals and plan, and were asked to write down the name of someone with whom they would share the plan. The goal setting, planning, and commitments participants established during week 1 were completed during the training sessions with guidance from facilitators, and the templates they filled out during weeks 2–4 were included in the workbook.

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## Implementation

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**The intervention was implemented in 8 of the 14 employment offices located in 7 of 10 Mauritian districts.** Adequate space and infrastructure for the training were the main criteria for site selection. Youth were identified through a registry of job-seekers ages 16–35 with low educational attainment. A third-party survey firm invited them to participate through phone calls and SMSs. After confirming their eligibility, participants selected their preferred date and time to attend the training at a location near their residence. Each received an SMS reminder 1 day prior to their session.<sup>2</sup> Youth visited the specified venue on the selected day and completed the baseline survey, before being randomly assigned to a control arm (no training and no boost) or a treatment arm (training and boost). Random assignment was conducted within each data collection session to avoid self-selection bias and ensure balance between treatment and control arms.

Intervention implementation started on March 9, 2020. The baseline survey and training were planned to last 18 calendar days and to finish on March 27, and the end line survey was scheduled for early May. However, the COVID-19 outbreak forced suspension of field activities only 10 days after the start, so only 306 individuals (147 treated) participated in the training instead of the planned 1,040 (520 per arm).

The World Bank team recruited and trained 5 facilitators with degrees in social work or psychology and previous professional experience with the target population to deliver the training and the boost. The facilitators (2 per session) delivered the training in 2-hour session to groups of up to 12 job-seekers. The phone boost took place 4 to 5 weeks after training.

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<sup>2</sup> Individuals were considered eligible if they were NEET as well as if they had done only a small amount of paid work (up to six hours) in the seven days prior to the interview.

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## Results<sup>3</sup>

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We aggregated outcomes into 3 main groups: job search and employability, socioemotional skills, and labor market outcomes (Table 1).

**Job search and employability:** The training had highly positive impacts on compliance with the specific job search strategies covered during the training activities: preparing, revising, or submitting a CV (33 percentage points); asking for a referral or requesting a recommendation letter (21 percentage points); and developing a job search plan (13 percentage points).

**Socioemotional skills.** The intervention did not affect the socioemotional skills covered (columns 5-7). These null effects are not surprising considering that soft skills training focused on goal setting and planning. Consistently, significant differences were found in job search intensity and reference seeking, in line with previous research.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, the intervention included guidance and information about the Mauritian labor market (job search training and primer). While there was no significant difference between the control and treatment groups on job search expectations (the number of months to find a job), interpretation is made difficult by the COVID-19 labor market-related disruptions.<sup>5</sup>

**Labor market outcomes:** The intervention did not improve the employment of participants (column 8). This is not surprising for at least 2 reasons. First, the time between the intervention and the end line data collection—the “exposure time” —was a short 4 to 5 weeks. Second, COVID-19 led to a sudden decline in economic activity and labor demand worldwide as well as restrictions on the movements of people. Thus, it would have been difficult to observe employment effects, which are a combination of

several factors, including labor demand, labor supply, and matching.

**Gender differences:** While more women than men participated in the intervention, some evidence implies that the intervention was more effective in increasing job search efforts for young men. For “asking for a referral” or “requesting a recommendation letter”, the intervention was more likely to succeed for men than for women (36 percentage points and 13 percentage points, respectively). There are no significant differences by gender for the other 2 job search strategies, which may partly be due to lack of statistical power given the smaller than anticipated sample size. Nonetheless, these findings, as well as focus group discussions, indicate that female labor force participation is constrained by factors, such as lack of childcare services and traditional gender norms, not addressed by the intervention.

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## Lessons

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**The positive results in the midst of an unprecedented economic crisis indicate the potential of behaviorally-informed interventions for vulnerable populations.** Well-designed, simple, and low-cost training and mentoring calls can motivate young jobseekers with low education to follow through on job search tasks. However, the intervention revealed structural factors that limit vocational and skills training. The lack of intrahousehold and family support for women, or literacy gaps in English or French, are 2 examples of entry barriers to the labor market for youth. Cost-effective actions should complement support services and formal training, allowing inactive youth to at least have a chance at securing work.

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<sup>3</sup> The results discussed in this section cover the treatment-on-the-treated effect, which captures the impact of the actual participation in the training and boost activities on the outcomes, after controlling for those who did not take part in the boost training.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Abel, Simon Martin, Rulof Petrus Burger, and Patrizio Piraino. 2017. “The Value of Reference Letters.” Policy Research Working Paper 8266, World Bank, Washington, DC. Briscese, Guglielmo, and Cameron Tan. 2018. “Applying Behavioural Insights to Labour Markets: How Behavioural Insights Can Improve Employment Policies and Programmes.” Behavioural Insights Team, London.

<sup>5</sup> Additional reasons for not detecting any statistically significant effects can be found in the full version of the study available at <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/582261592536259683/>.

Figure 1. Components of the Job-Seeker’s Workbook, Training, and Primer



Table 1. Intervention Impacts on Selected Outcomes: Treatment on the Treated

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	Prepared or posted CV	Requested references	Worked on search plan	Looked for work	Grit	Growth mindset	Expectations	Worked
Training and boost	0.332*** (0.055)	0.208*** (0.041)	0.130** (0.041)	0.123 (0.067)	-0.045 (0.096)	0.075 (0.058)	-0.056 (0.091)	-0.044 (0.065)
No boost	-0.154 (0.133)	-0.154 (0.124)	-0.058 (0.129)	-0.047 (0.106)	0.006 (0.177)	0.13 (0.091)	-0.246 (0.246)	0.001 (0.192)
Constant	0.454*** (0.120)	0.130 (0.234)	-0.186* (0.094)	0.399* (0.196)	4.011*** (0.449)	0.733** (0.282)	4.569*** (0.219)	0.099 (0.235)
N	280	280	280	280	280	280	280	280

Note: Estimates from an ordinary least squares regression, including individual sociodemographic controls (female, age, marital status as single, and educational attainment), and fixed effects for the day of random assignment. Standard errors are clustered at the EIC level. Dependent variables 1–4, 6 and 8 are defined as dichotomous variables set equal to 1 if respondent reported the stated activity at the end line survey, and dependent variables 5 and 7 are the averages of 2 and 6 respective items, scored on a Likert agreeableness scale ranging from 1 to 5. Significance level: \* = 10 percent, \*\* = 5 percent, \*\*\* = 1 percent.

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This note series is intended to summarize good practices and key policy findings on Poverty-related topics. The views expressed in the notes are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the World Bank, its board or its member countries. Copies of this notes series are available on [www.worldbank.org/poverty](http://www.worldbank.org/poverty)

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## The key for a healthy development

### Why parenting matters for children in the 21st century

1 January 2021



Understanding today's nature of childhood requires an understanding of parenting in the 21st century. Parents and caregivers fundamentally shape children's lives and everyday experiences, which has a major impact on their cognitive, academic and socio-emotional development. [1] They also have a major impact on children's health and well-being.

Parenting now, as in the past, is challenging and demanding. Family life has changed over the years, bringing about new challenges for parents and the question if the way children are raised should change as well. [2] Unsurprisingly, many parents are uncertain how to master the parenting challenge. [3] Today, a wide variety of support services and information about parenting are offered offline as well as online (digital platforms, blogs, campaigns, parenting programs and other services).

Yet, parenting programs and other support services are implemented and run by a large variety of actors. [4] Particularly in countries where private, commercial providers cover huge shares of provision, cost and quality may vary substantially and not all offers may live up to their promise. [5] Parents may feel overwhelmed by the array of programs offered and unsure about the best choice. For governments and local authorities, on the

Scholars point that the social importance of the parent role has inflated, which for many has evolved to an 'identity-work' akin to a vocation. Consequently, the feeling of fulfilment and achievement depends for many parents on their children. At the same time, parents perceive a reduction of control with less room to influence their children than in the past, leading to widespread concerns among parents about their ability to ensure children's well-being and success in the future.

Recent studies suggest that warm parenting that provides children with age-appropriate autonomy and structure is key for a healthy and prosperous development of children.

*Extract of OECD Education Working Paper 'Why parenting matters for children in the 21st century: An evidence-based framework for understanding parenting and its impact on child development' by Hannah Ulferts.*

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other hand, it may be difficult to decide how to best support parents, for instance, which parenting approach to promote through services and how to address best the needs and worries of 21st century parents.

Many parents turn to the Internet or parenting books and may get lost and confused by the sheer endless number of parenting approaches advocated for and warned against, from holistic and attachment parenting to hothousing and buddy parenting. [6] Taking a look at the sphere of available information reveals a confusing range of advertised parenting approaches with little or no evidence, on the one hand, and approaches that are well established and researched, on the other hand.

The study, therefore, provides a structured overview of the existing scientific parenting literature. Since ensuring a healthy and prosperous development of children is a primary concern of parents, policy-makers and professionals alike, the study aims at developing an evidence-based framework for understanding parenting and its influence on child development. The study focuses on the relatively global, consistent, and stable approaches to child rearing across situations and domains as they are considered key for predicting child outcomes. [7] The various references to parenting approach are referring to:

*Parenting dimensions*, which capture general characteristics of parents' approach to child rearing. Parental warmth, for example, describes parent-child interactions as warm, comforting and sensitive.

*Parenting styles*, which describe the parenting approach along different dimensions. The authoritative parenting style, for instance, refers to parenting that is warm, loving and sets clear expectations for children's behavior.

### Parenting in the 21st Century

Over the last half century the world has changed fundamentally, causing shift in expectations and experiences of how parents raise their children [8]. In the last two decades rates of fertility and marriage decreased, whereas the rates of divorce and numbers of single parent households increased. [9] Consequently, family forms and living arrangements have diversified with an increase of unmarried or divorced families, and single parents. Most children, both within OECD countries and beyond, live with two parents (whether biological, step, adoptive or foster, married or unmarried), with an average of 17% children under 18 living with one parent in 2017. [10] As family stability has decreased, many children experience different family living arrangements throughout their childhood and many children move from one household to another on a regular basis due to shared custody arrangements.

Parents are often older, better educated and tend to have fewer children. [11] More mothers work while raising their children. [12] Moreover, migration has led to unprecedented ethnic, cultural and religious diversity within many societies.

In modernized societies many families feel disconnected from their neighborhoods and communities. [13] This has weakened the informal social support and safety net for a lot of families, requiring more families to assume full responsibility for their children's welfare, rather than relying on the extended family and community as a whole to join in the oversight, protection, and nurturing of children. [14]

Today's parents, however, receive greater public support. Governments and municipalities increasingly focus on parenting in public provision and policy, [15] despite the fact that raising children is still essentially a private matter and parents have a lot of freedom in raising children. In many countries schools and early childhood education and care facilities have increased their provision and also their work with parents. Often families not only receive financial support but are also offered information and hands-on support through different initiatives and parenting programs. [16] At the same time, parenting support has developed into a lucrative market. Forbes estimates the 2019 market size of "the new mom economy" at USD 46 billion. [17]

Globalization and technology have exponentially increased the competition and uncertainty in the labor market. Technology has introduced further changes to family life, modifying the way family members interact. In the digital era, parents can seek and exchange support and information more easily than ever. [18] Millennial parents seem to prefer to consult the Internet and social media before seeing a professional offline or asking family members or neighbors. [19].

However, with more parents turning to digital platforms, chat groups and other less regulated channels as primary sources for information and support, new challenges emerge. Parents, especially insecure parents, have always been an easy target for misinformation and manipulation and while false and fabricated information are far from new, the "complexity and scale of information pollution in our digitally-connected world presents an unprecedented challenge". [20] A massive amount of information is shared by different actors - not all parenting experts - and with an honest interest in helping struggling or insecure parents. The desire to distort information for political, social or economic gain always existed but digital content gets reproduced and amplified at an unbelievable speed. [21]

Unsurprisingly, parents report suffering from such information pollution. [22] It seems almost impossible to escape public debates about the relative benefits and harms of different parenting. They are captured in a myriad of ubiquitous stories, parenting help books, blogs, and articles. Debates are often polarized without any evidence or with evidence selectively cited. Colorful, descriptive labels are used such as "Free-Range Kids", or "Buddy Parents" to heat up debates and underline positions. [23] Counterbalancing such heated public debates and insecurities attached to it, requires a thorough evaluation of the current evidence base on parenting.

## Parenting framework

The study proposes a parenting framework that synthesizes and reviews parenting literature and integrates the factors explaining variations and differential impacts of parenting approaches. It discusses some implications for family policies and support, as well as research implications.

In the 21st century, as in the past, parents differ in how they raise their children. Such differences can be described with dimensions or styles, which have been shown to affect children and adolescents' development across a wide range of outcomes. Overall, an authoritative approach that is warm and provides structure and autonomy seems to foster a prosperous and healthy development, while neglecting children and adolescents and thwarting their needs for relatedness, competence and autonomy seems particularly harmful.

Notwithstanding, neither parenting nor child development occur in a vacuum: Both emerge in a national, regional and family context. [24] The framework points to the main factors explaining variations in parenting and its impact on different levels: individual; family, neighborhoods and community; and the wider context. More specifically, the reviewed literature in the study suggests that parenting approaches and their impact vary because:

- *A family's past and present cannot be understood in isolation from history, modernization and the wider context of parenting:* Parenting and child development are both directly and indirectly influenced by the wider socio-cultural, demographic, physical, technological, economic and political forces that change over time.
- *"It takes a village to raise a child":* Families depend on socio-economic and social resources in their functioning. The wider context affects family life through its influence on the resources of families and the communities that families live in 2016.
- *Parenting is a "family-centered process", instead of primarily parent- or child-driven:* Parenting consists in a process of mutual adaptation, accommodation, and negotiation between parents and children. These negotiations and interactions are embedded in a history of family relationships (e.g. parent-child trust or mistrust, quality of co-parenting), which constrains the interpretation of parents and children of the other's behavior.
- *Parenting is an expression of parents' individuality:* Rather than exclusively directed to the child, parenting is also an expression of gender roles as well as of personal experiences and attributes of parents.
- *Parenting is a two-way street and children are also in the driver's seat:* Children and adolescents are not passive recipients of parenting but influence their parents at the same time that parents influence their children. Children evoke, interpret and react to parenting, and, thus, actively shape it and its developmental impact.

## Policy Implications

The review of the parenting literature highlighted the role of parenting for a healthy and prosperous development of children and adolescents. Without a doubt, parenting is challenging and requires support. While parenting is in many respects a private matter, public policies can create structures and services that enable parents to acquire and practice parenting skills beneficial for a prosperous and healthy development of children. There are various options for policy and practice to support families. As illustrated in the review and framework, focusing exclusively on the parents seems shortsighted; an effective parenting strategy is multi-layered and includes, inter alia, the following: [25]

- *Increasing the economic support to families:* Economic hardship is related to disrupted family functioning and parenting as well as negative child outcomes. Moreover, studies from different countries showed that a higher living standard relates to authoritative parenting and that cash transfers for families can improve parenting behaviors and child outcomes. Thus, a system of taxes and social benefits that provides an adequate income for families, including single parents, could help mitigate family stress and improve family functioning.
- *Mitigating family stress and enhancing family bonding through labor market and welfare policies:* Labor market, housing and welfare policies can also help parents in their functioning, for example by reducing precarious working conditions, ensuring stable, well-paid jobs and allowing flexibility in work models without repercussions. Time to care for children that is compensated for by paid leave allows for quality time and bonding, especially in the early years. This is crucial for establishing trusting relationships and warm and supportive parenting and paid parental leave has shown to relate to parental well-being and maternal employment rate after the leave period.
- *Empowering communities and strengthening the local support network for families:* Family functioning depends on the quality of neighborhoods and cohesive, well-resourced communities. Supportive communities provide high-quality family services as well as recreational areas and services, where families can meet and exchange parenting experiences and advice. Special attention should be given to restructuring dangerous, deprived neighborhoods as they can impede with parenting and exacerbate its impact. Connecting professionals working with parents is key, so that insecure or struggling parents are referred to the support needed. Reducing the physical distance of services such as offering services under one roof seems particularly promising.
- *Promoting beneficial parenting approaches through various initiatives:* Increased efforts are needed to counterbalance heated debates and expose parenting myths and misinformation spread on social media or other media. Parenting programs and low-

threshold initiatives should promote need-supportive parenting while discouraging need-thwarting and harmful parenting behaviors.

- *Ensuring high-quality and affordable programs:* Parenting programs can be effective in supporting parents of children and adolescents but quality on the market varies. Communities can support parents by implementing high-quality, affordable programs and regulating the private market, to the extent possible. Evaluation studies should have proven that offered programs effectively promote behavior that improves parent-child-interactions, relationship quality and child development. Programs should not only educate parents but also provide practical, guided training and ensure the transfer of acquired knowledge and skills.
- *Designing approaches that are strength- and community-based, family centered and enable individualized support for all families:* Support offers to families should build on the needs as well as existing or latent strength and resources of families and communities, instead of focusing on deficits and problems. Community stakeholders should be involved in the design and implementation process.
- *Strengthening schools' capacity for family support:* Schools should be supported in their capacity to build strong home-school-partnerships and trusting parent-teacher-relationships out of several reasons: Firstly, the scoped evidence suggests that parents' approach to child raising has important implications for children's success and well-being at school. Secondly, the involvement of parents in children's school life and career relates positively to academic achievement of students. Thirdly, effective work with parents is challenging for schools and teachers, particularly in terms of connecting to hard-to-reach, less involved families. All professionals working with families need specific training in working with families with diverse backgrounds and needs: They should be sensitive and respond adequately to common parental fears as well as

behaviors and expectations of parents varying in cultural and socio-economic background.

- *Remaining open to diversity and considering cultural differences in family support:* The expectations towards families and policies developed for them might not fit well with ethnic minority families whose parenting diverge from the dominant approach. A simple translation of language is not sufficient for a cultural adaptation, where an orientation towards the everyday realities and cultural norms may be needed.

## Conclusion

In sum, the study highlights the importance of parenting approaches for the development of children and adolescents across various domains. Warm parenting that provides children with age-appropriate autonomy and structure is key for a healthy and prosperous development of children. The parenting approach adopted by parents but also its effect varies and research pointed to various contextual factors and individual factors explaining these variations. A systematic consideration of such factors not only sharpens the scientific understanding of parenting and its impact but also helps improving family policies and support. [26] To inform policymaking, practice and science, however, research needs to increase efforts to:

- Close research gaps, elaborate the practical implication of basic parenting research, and explore the generalizability of findings across cultures, developmental domains and all key figures involved in raising a child.
- Strengthen the methodological soundness and diversity of studies as well as the measurement of parenting approaches.
- Improve the conceptual clarity of parenting concepts, the comparability of their operationalization, and the scientific understanding of how different concepts relate to each other.

[1] Bornstein, 2019; Skinner, Johnson and Snyder, 2005.  
[2] Zahran, 2011; Burns and Gottschalk, 2019.  
[3] Dworkin, Connell and Doty, 2013; Radey and Randolph, 2009.  
[4] Daly, 2013.  
[5] Institute of Behavioral Science, 2020; Haslam, 2016.  
[6] Burns and Gottschalk, 2019.  
[7] Rodrigo, Byrne and Rodríguez, 2014; Smetana, 2017.  
[8] Faircloth, 2014; Hayford, Guzzo and Smock, 2014.  
[9] OECD, 2011.  
[10] Miho and Thévenon, 2020; UN DESA, 2019.  
[11] Hayford et al. 2014; Bongaarts, Mensch & Blanc, 2017.  
[12] Miho and Thévenon, 2020.  
[13] OECD, 2016; Zahran, 2011.

[14] Pimentel, 2016.  
[15] Daly et al., 2015.  
[16] Rodrigo, 2010; Daly et al., 2015.  
[17] Klich, 2019.  
[18] Radey and Randolph, 2009.  
[19] İlnur Külhaş Çelik, 2019; Setyastuti et al., 2019.  
[20] Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017, p. 10.  
[21] Humprecht, Esser and Van Aelst, 2020.  
[22] Özgür, 2016.  
[23] Tremblay et al., 2015.  
[24] Bornstein, 2012; Hill et al., 2007; Prevoo & Tamis-LeMonda, 2017.  
[25] Ulferts, 2020.  
[26] Mitchell, 2012.



Make  
Mothers  
Matter

## MMM ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE MOTHERS' ROLE AND RIGHTS

### Placing care and education at the heart of a new human rights-based economic system

The 3rd intersessional meeting of the UN Human Rights Council on human rights and the 2030 Agenda took place on 14 January, under the theme “Building back better: Integrating human rights in sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic”.

MMM contributed with the following statement to the discussion:

*“The pandemic has shown us who is doing the work that really matters: nurses, teachers, care workers. As we recover, we need to remember this. It is time to end the inequities of unpaid care work and create new economic models that work for everyone.”*

António Guterres, UN Secretary-General,  
Town Hall with Young Women from Civil Society Organizations on 31 August 2020

We at Make Mothers Matter (MMM) fully endorse the Secretary-General’s timely comment but place mothers alongside teachers, nurses and care workers because mothers are also playing a vital role in keeping their children, families and communities together.

The COVID-19 crisis and its cascade of consequences have shown what really matters: It has all been about care and education, and the people performing these duties, whether paid or unpaid. It has laid bare the critical role of care, not only healthcare, but also **unpaid care work**, i.e. the work that is carried out on a daily basis within families to raise and educate children and take care of each family member, each dependant relative.

This work, which is taken for granted, remains invisible and unaccounted for in our economic system, even though it is essential for the proper functioning of our economies and our societies, both in the short and long term.

At the global level, three quarters of this work is done by women, an inequitable distribution which is at the heart of gender inequalities. Even in developed countries where women’s rights are most advanced, unpaid family care work and responsibility remain one of the main obstacles to a woman’s economic emancipation, especially when they have children. Motherhood often carries a heavy cost for mothers: the care gap results in a labour force participation gap, pay and pension gaps, not to mention the sticky floor and the glass ceiling when it comes to promotion at decision-making-level positions. And the COVID-19 crisis has only exacerbated this situation.

Most policies which have sought to address this issue have so far followed the so-called “**3 Rs framework**”, which also underlies target 5.4 of the 2030 Agenda:

- **Recognition:** by measuring unpaid care work to make it visible.
- **Redistribution:** by promoting better distribution of unpaid care work 1) between men and women (e.g. through paternity leave, parental leave, promotion of the role of the father), and 2) between families and the rest of society (e.g. support for parents, policies for reconciling work and family, promotion of care as a collective responsibility).
- **Reduction:** by developing physical and social infrastructures and services aimed at reducing the workload of families, women in particular (access to water and energy, care and childcare structures and services, communication services, etc.).

However, while all these measures are absolutely necessary and make it possible to improve the situation, they remain insufficient: although in a growing number of countries, women are achieving the same level of education as men – or even surpassing it – no country in the world today has achieved gender equality in the economic sphere, and progress has stalled or even regressed in many countries.

This is a crisis of care, which is not about to be resolved, especially in view of population ageing, and in the context of COVID-19 and its economic devastation – which disproportionately affect women. To “build back better”, it is therefore necessary to take a broader perspective and consider more systemic changes.

One of the fundamental problems is our current economic system, which is both completely blind to and dependent on unpaid care work.

The same could be said of the environment: our economic system is blind to environmental destruction, but at the same time it completely depends on it.

**The care and the environmental crisis converge to denounce an economic system that exploits the unpaid work of women, the so-called “reproductive” work of mothers in particular, and the environment.**

The flagship indicator of the current system, GDP, is also too often wrongly equated with an indicator of progress or even well-being. However, GDP includes financial speculation, drug trafficking, health expenditure (the more we pollute, the more it increases), arms sales (wars generate GDP), etc. In addition, it does not account for the growing inequalities that are observed in most countries and which particularly affect women, or for all the social problems that arise from them, which also have a cost – and increase GDP.

**“Building back better” must start with repurposing our economic system to serve the well-being of people and the planet, and place human rights as well as care and education at its heart.**

At MMM, our main objective is to ensure that care and education, and the role of mothers and families, is at the heart of this new economic system. We believe all forms of care and education work, whether paid or unpaid, should be recognised and properly valued. They must also be seen as an investment (in human capital), not as expenses to be minimised.

**It is therefore time to build a new economic system whose primary objective is no longer profit maximisation and GDP growth, but the well-being of people and the planet. In other words, it is time that the economy serves people and the environment, not the other way round.**

Visit [Building back better by transforming our economic system to prioritize wellbeing – with care and education at its heart.](#)

### **Joint statement for EU Framework Directive on Minimum Income**

On 12 November 2020, in a joint statement together with numerous organisations, Make Mothers Matter (MMM) called on the European Commission to respond to the Council Conclusions of October 2020 on “Strengthening Minimum Income Protection to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion in the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond” by making an ambitious proposal for an EU Framework Directive to guarantee an adequate, accessible and enabling minimum income.

We believe that an adequate guaranteed minimum income is a social and human right for all people and helps to guarantee a minimum standard of living and a decent life for all, enabling people to fully participate in society.

One of the best ways to prevent people being dragged into poverty is to build individual and societal

resilience – and **strong social protection systems** are the cornerstone of such resilience. In this context, **adequate, accessible and enabling minimum income schemes have an essential role to play as an ultimate safety net.**

Access the [full statement](#).

## **MMM responds to European Commission’s Public Consultation on the European Pillar of Social Rights**

On 27 November 2020, MMM responded to the EU Public Consultation: “Have your say on reinforcing Social Europe”.

The **European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR)** sets a framework for a socially just and fair society based on **20 key principles**. Several of these principles are vital to the economic empowerment and social protection of mothers. They include:

- Education, training, and life-long learning
- Gender equality
- Active support to employment
- Work-life balance
- Childcare and support to children
- Old-age income and pensions
- Housing and assistance for the homeless

Considering the importance of the above principles, Make Mothers Matter welcomes the EU Public Consultation on the implementation of the EPSR.

For each of the principles listed above, our paper provides background information on how they affect mothers (context), describes the guiding principles behind our recommendations (what we call for) and how these recommendations could be implemented.

In this paper, we highlight that the COVID-19 crisis has hit mothers particularly hard. The reason for this is rooted in the unequal distribution of care and other responsibilities within the household. Women with children under 7 years of age on average spend 20 hours per week more than men on unpaid work.[1] In the context of the pandemic and imposed lockdowns, the demand for unpaid care work and informal education has increased and reinforced pre-existing gender inequalities in sharing this essential work.[2]

The COVID-19 crisis has shifted care duties back into private households and will have more severe negative effects on women’s income, as they take on this duty at the cost of their labour market participation, thus losing current and future income.[3] It also hinders their opportunities to engage in life-long learning.[4] Recent literature[5] has documented that gender inequalities in earnings and income are closely related to care duties for children, which fall disproportionately on mothers. This is the translation of the motherhood penalty suffered by women with children.

Unpaid care work is indispensable. Someone must respond to the material, educational and emotional needs of the members of a family, not only children but also people affected by a handicap, illness or old age. As the population of Europe is ageing, the need for care will only increase and the care gap will too. Yet, until this care work is recognised, reduced and redistributed, it will continue to hinder women’s and especially mothers’ rights. It is therefore a precondition to the implementation of the principles outlined in the EPSR.

In this paper, MMM makes **recommendations** on how this **care work** can be

- **recognised**, such as by introducing “care credits” to offset breaks from employment taken to provide informal care and counting those credits towards pension entitlements, and by recognising and validating the skills acquired while doing unpaid family care work;
- **reduced** by providing high-quality childcare centres that are accessible and affordable while giving parents a true choice between outsourced or in-family care solutions, as it was clearly highlighted by mothers in our survey “What Matters to Mothers in Europe”[6]); and
- **redistributed** by implementing policies that directly encourage fathers to take leave and adopt work-life balance measures, allowing families to adjust their employment according to the needs of each child, the ages and number of children.

These recommendations also include giving single parents, especially single mothers, better social protection.

As a member of the Social Platform and the Alliance for Investing in Children, MMM has also contributed to their responses to this European Commission Consultation.[7]

Read the full [MMM response to the EU Public Consultation](#).

[1] EIGE, “Gender Equality Index; Index score for European Union for 2020”, 2020.

[2] Z. BLASKÓ, E. PAPADIMITRIOU, A. MANCA, “How will the COVID-19 crisis affect existing gender divides in Europe?”, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020.

[3] Z. BLASKÓ, E. PAPADIMITRIOU, A. MANCA, Ibid.

[4] EIGE, op.cit., p.123.

[5] T. M. ALON, M. DOEPKE, J. Olmstead-Rumsey, and M. TERTILT, “The impact of COVID-19 on gender equality”, 2020; EIGE, “Tackling the gender pay gap: not without a better work-life balance”, 2019.

[6] Results of our survey carried out with 12,000 mothers in Europe. Make Mothers Matter, “What Matters to Mothers in Europe”, 2011, available at <https://makemothersmatter.org/delegations/europe/what-matters-to-mothers-in-europe>.

[7] See the responses of the [Social Platform](#) and the [Alliance for Investing in Children](#).

## **MMM member “Irish Maternity Support Network” contributes to first national Maternity Experience Survey**

In October 2020, the results of the first Irish Maternity Experience Survey provided important insights into women’s experiences at all stages of maternity care in Ireland – antenatal, care during labour and birth, and postnatal care. This major national survey was carried out by HIQA (Health Information and Quality Authority) in conjunction with the HSE (Irish Health Service Executive) in October and November 2019, as part of the Irish Maternity Strategy 2016–2026.

MMM associate member Irish Maternity Support Network (IMSN) was involved in the development of this survey right from the start. IMSN co-founder Edel Quirke, who sat on the committee, made extensive contributions as the service user representative.

### **Main findings**

Overall, 85% of the women reported having had a good or very good experience, with 15% describing it as fair or poor. The lower scoring of more negative findings was consistent across all units with regard to the lack of information in the antenatal period and poor mental health support throughout, particularly in the postnatal period.

One of the most concerning findings was in the area of respect and dignity – between 19 and 26% of the women reported that they were not always treated with dignity and respect throughout their antenatal

and postnatal care. In a survey of 3,204 women, this represents over 830 women who exited the maternity services having experienced the impact and subsequent effects of such negative treatment.

### **Loss during pregnancy and childbirth**

One of the aspects of maternity care that wasn't addressed in this survey was the experience of loss during pregnancy and how women experience their care in Ireland's maternity services during such a painful and traumatic time. Following considerable representation by Edel Quirke and support from other members, the survey committee has given an undertaking that the next maternity experience survey, due to be carried out within the next two years, will focus exclusively on the experiences women have in maternity services following loss. IMSN recommended that other organisations that support people experiencing bereavement and loss during pregnancy and childbirth be consulted and represented on the committee when preparing this next survey.

[Here](#), you can find a link to the [Survey](#) and watch the [video](#) where Edel Quirke, representative of women using maternity services to the National Maternity Experience Survey Programme Board talks to Rachel Flynn (Chair) and the Programme Board about the results of the first ever National Maternity Experience Survey, published on 1 October 2020.

### **About Make Mothers Matter – MMM**

Make Mothers Matter believes in the power of mothers to make the world a better place, advocating for their recognition and support as changemakers.

Created in 1947, MMM is an international NGO with no political or religious affiliations, transparently voicing the concerns of mothers at the highest level: the European Union, UNESCO and the United Nations (general consultative status).

Compiled by Irina Pálffy-Daun-Seiler, MMM Representative to the United Nations in Vienna, with input from Valérie Bichelmeier, MMM Representative to the United Nations in Geneva, and Johanna Schima, Head of the European Delegation of MMM.

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**Recent & Upcoming Events**

**March**

- 04-05: ICPFRH 2021: 15. International Conference on Population, Family and Reproductive Health (Rome, Italy, digital)  
<https://waset.org/population-family-and-reproductive-health-conference-in-march-2021-in-rome>
- 25-26: ICPOND 2021: 15. International Conference on Pediatric Obesity and Nutrient Deficiencies (Tokyo, Japan, digital)  
<https://waset.org/pediatric-obesity-and-nutrient-deficiencies-conference-in-march-2021-in-tokyo>

**April**

- 05-06: ICFS 2021: 15. International Conference on Family and Society (Cancun, Mexico, digital)  
<https://waset.org/family-and-society-conference-in-april-2021-in-cancun>
- 05-06: ICSF 2021: 15. International Conference on Sociology of the Family (Dubai, United Arab Emirates, digital)  
<https://waset.org/sociology-of-the-family-conference-in-april-2021-in-dubai>
- 08-09: ICRSHFP 2021: 15. International Conference on Reproductive, Sexual Health and Family Planning (Athens, Greece, digital)  
<https://waset.org/reproductive-sexual-health-and-family-planning-conference-in-april-2021-in-athens>

**May**

- 13-14: ICFSM 2021: 15. International Conference on Family and Sports Medicine (Amsterdam, Netherlands, digital)  
<https://waset.org/family-and-sports-medicine-conference-in-may-2021-in-amsterdam>
- 20-21: ICFSS 2021: 15. International Conference on Family Studies and Sociology (Vancouver, Canada, digital)  
<https://waset.org/family-studies-and-sociology-conference-in-may-2021-in-vancouver>

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