




[www.viennafamilycommittee.org](http://www.viennafamilycommittee.org)  
[Digital Networks](#)  
[www.10yearsIYF.org](http://www.10yearsIYF.org)  
[www.20yearsIYF.org](http://www.20yearsIYF.org)

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

March 2025, No. 133  
Deadline for contributions: 15.05.2025

**Vienna NGO Committee on the Family**  
VALERIA FOGLAR-DEINHARDSTEIN, M.Sc.  
LIECHTENSTEINSTRASSE 111-115  
1090 VIENNA  
AUSTRIA  
EMAIL: [CONTACT@VIENNAFAMILYCOMMITTEE.ORG](mailto:CONTACT@VIENNAFAMILYCOMMITTEE.ORG) 

Dear Readers of 'Families International',

In this 133<sup>rd</sup> issue of the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family quarterly bulletin, you will find a variety of family-related texts and knowledge resources.

Starting off the issue, the Committee has provided its Annual Report for the year 2024. Following this, you can read the statement to the Commission for Social Development (UNCSD), drafted by our Committee and submitted by several of our member organisations. After a methodological brief by UNICEF Innocenti on the topic of positive deviance in education, you can also find texts by two of the Committee's member organisations: The International Federation for Family Development (IFFD) addresses family-centred cities while Make Mothers Matter (MMM) report on their most recent activities to promote mothers' role and rights.

As always, you can also find a list of recent and upcoming events at the end of this 133<sup>rd</sup> issue of Families International (FI).

Sincerely,  
Karin Kuzmanov, MSc  
Executive Editor

<b>Table of Contents</b>
--------------------------

**From the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family**

Annual Report 2024 3

**Statement to the Commission for Social Development (UNCSD)**

Statement drafted by our Committee and submitted by the International Council of Women, European Union of Women, Kolping International, Make Mothers Matter, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council and member organizations of the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family 9

**From UNICEF Innocenti**

Applying positive deviance in education 11

**From Member Organisations of the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family**

International Federation for Family Development (IFFD)

Family-Centered Cities: Urban Planning Response to Family Needs 20

Make Mothers Matter (MMM)

MMM Activities to Promote Mothers' Role and Rights 24

**Recent & Upcoming Events** 30

**Impressum** 31

***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)



**Office of the Chairperson Vienna NGO  
Committee on the Family**

**Valeria Foglar-Deinhardstein M.Sc.**

**Liechtensteinstrasse 111-115**

**A-1090 Vienna**

**E-Mail: [contact@viennafamilycommittee.org](mailto:contact@viennafamilycommittee.org)**

***ANNUAL REPORT 2024***

**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 2024

At a Full Committee Meeting, which, was held in person, and 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 2024*

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

Issues, Nos. 129-132 of the Quarterly Bulletin of the Committee, were published online in 2024 at [www.viennafamilycommittee.org](http://www.viennafamilycommittee.org). The Editorial Committee consists of the Editors, Julia Birner B.A., Christin Kohler, M.A., Karin Kuzmanov M.Sc., Hannah Prüwasser, B.A., and the Deputy-Editor, Peter Crowley, Ph.D., who had been the Editor from 2009 to 2020.

Special features in FI in 2024 included, amongst others: Issues relating to Families at the 62th United Nations Commission for Social Development (CSD) 2024, The State of the World's Children, Nutrition & Child Survival, as well as other relevant texts from United Nations Agencies.

Each issue of Families International also included texts submitted by member organizations of the Committee. Ca. 700 readers of 'Families International' are informed, by the Secretariat of the Committee, when each issue is published and available to download free of cost from the Committee Website.

#### **2. International Forum: May 13<sup>th</sup> 2024**

At the International Forum, The Vienna Committee hosted the distinguished speaker, Prof. Dr. Eva Beaujouan, from the University of Vienna, who provided invaluable perspectives on global family and fertility trends, and her comprehensive analysis, highlighted the evolving dynamics of family structures and fertility patterns over the past three decades, as well as providing a profound understanding of the social, economic, and cultural factors influencing these trends, and offering insights into how these changes shape family life worldwide. The Vienna Committee also hosted Prof. Dr. Bahira Trask from the University of Delaware, who joined the meeting online, to present on "Supporting Families in a Globalized World: Family Science and the United Nations 2030 Agenda." Prof. Trask emphasized the critical role of family science in addressing the challenges faced by families globally, especially as they are a vital source for sustainable development. and also underscored the need for the recognition of families within global policy frameworks, aligning family support measures with the broader goals of sustainable development.

### **3. International Forum: Nov. 4<sup>th</sup> 2024**

The Committee further organised and held a second International Forum, during a Full Committee Meeting, on Monday Nov. 4<sup>th</sup> 2024 at the United Nations Vienna International Centre, with Regina Hartweg-Weiss, from the Dept. of Family Policy at the Federal Chancellery of Austria, on ‘Celebrating 30years of the of the International Year of the Family: Austria’s Initiatives in 2024’ and with Vlatko Gorchev, Organisation for Economic Co-Operation & Development (OECD) and National Coordinator for Demography, Macedonia, on ‘A Macedonian View on Family and Youth Policy’

-

### **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, and organised the above mentioned International Forum to observe the United Nations International Day of Families in May 2024.

**The 62<sup>th</sup> United Nations Commission for Social Development (UNCSD)** scheduled for February 2024, had as its **Priority Theme: ‘Fostering social development & social justice through social policies to accelerate progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to achieve the overarching goal of poverty eradication.’**

The Committee Coordinator for the UNCSD, Franziska Reichel, drafted a statement for the Committee on this theme, and was signed by a number of member organisations of the Committee, and subsequently timely submitted in 2023 to the UNCSD by the Committee, and has since become an official document of the UNCSD in 2024.

<https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N23/358/25/PDF/N2335825.pdf?OpenElement>

An eighty page report, of a study update entitled: **‘Documenting Contributions of Civil Society Organisations to the Well-Being of Families’** by Peter Crowley Ph.D. 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 in 2014, is available to download, on the United Nations website: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/family/international-day-of-families/2014-3.html>

The Report of the United Nations Secretary-General to the General Assembly on November 22<sup>nd</sup> 2023, (A/79/61-E/2024/48) on page 14, which relates to activities of the Committee on the Family in 2023, 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 non governmental organisation Committee on the Family organized an international forum to observe the International Day of Families with presentations on the theme: ‘Climate change. Migration: impact on families’ where the latest research by the United Nations Office on Drugs & Crime on human trafficking and migrant smuggling, with a focus on children was presented. The Committee also included migration as a theme in its quarterly bulletin “Families International” to highlight the preparations for the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, in 2024.” The website address of the Committee was also included in the footnotes.

### **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 online quarterly bulletin ‘Families International’. Issues Nos.129 to 132, which were published in 2024, may be downloaded from our website without cost to the reader. A button entitled ‘Families Online’ is also available on the homepage, with a direct link to the proceedings of three International Forums organised by the Committee, between 2017 and 2021, dealing with families and digital media usage. An update of the Committee website at will go online in 2025.

## **5. The Digital Networks of the Committee CSOs Networked - in Sub-Saharan Africa**

Laura Mysliwicz and Sebastian 'Oberreiter, kindly accepted the invitation of the Committee, in 2022, to become the 'Committee Digital-Networks Coordinators' updating the networks & websites.

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 2024, show that 5.5 billion or ca. 68% of the world's population is using the Internet, but only about 38% of the African population is online, while in the Americas it was 87%, Arab States 70%, Asia-Pacific 66%, in Europe 81%, while in lower developed countries it was merely 27%.

In the Digital Networks, set up and maintained by the Committee, many are based in Sub-Saharan Africa, which is particularly affected by the 'Digital Divide'. These 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 already 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 relevant for, amongst others, families.

[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, and present Secretary 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 entitled: '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 the then Chairperson and present Secretary Peter 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 setup 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 continues to offer knowledge resources on family issues for visitors to the website, by creating a so-called 'Cyber Street' of websites of families-oriented CSOs, which deal with the eight categories of the study 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.

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 by the Committee, which observed in 2024 the 39<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of its inception in 1985.

## **6. The Board of the Committee Elected for 2022 - 2025**

### **Board Officers:**

Chairperson: Valeria Foglar-Deinhardstein, M.Sc. European Union of Women  
Deputy Chairperson: Wolfgang Engelmaier, M.A. Kolping International,  
Secretary: Peter Crowley, Ph.D., International Council of Psychologists,  
Deputy Secretary: Franziska Reichel, Kolping International,  
Treasurer: Julia Zacharenkova, European Union of Women, who resigned in 2024.  
Claudia Schatzl-Alqudah, European Union of Women, was elected as the new Treasurer

### **Board Members:**

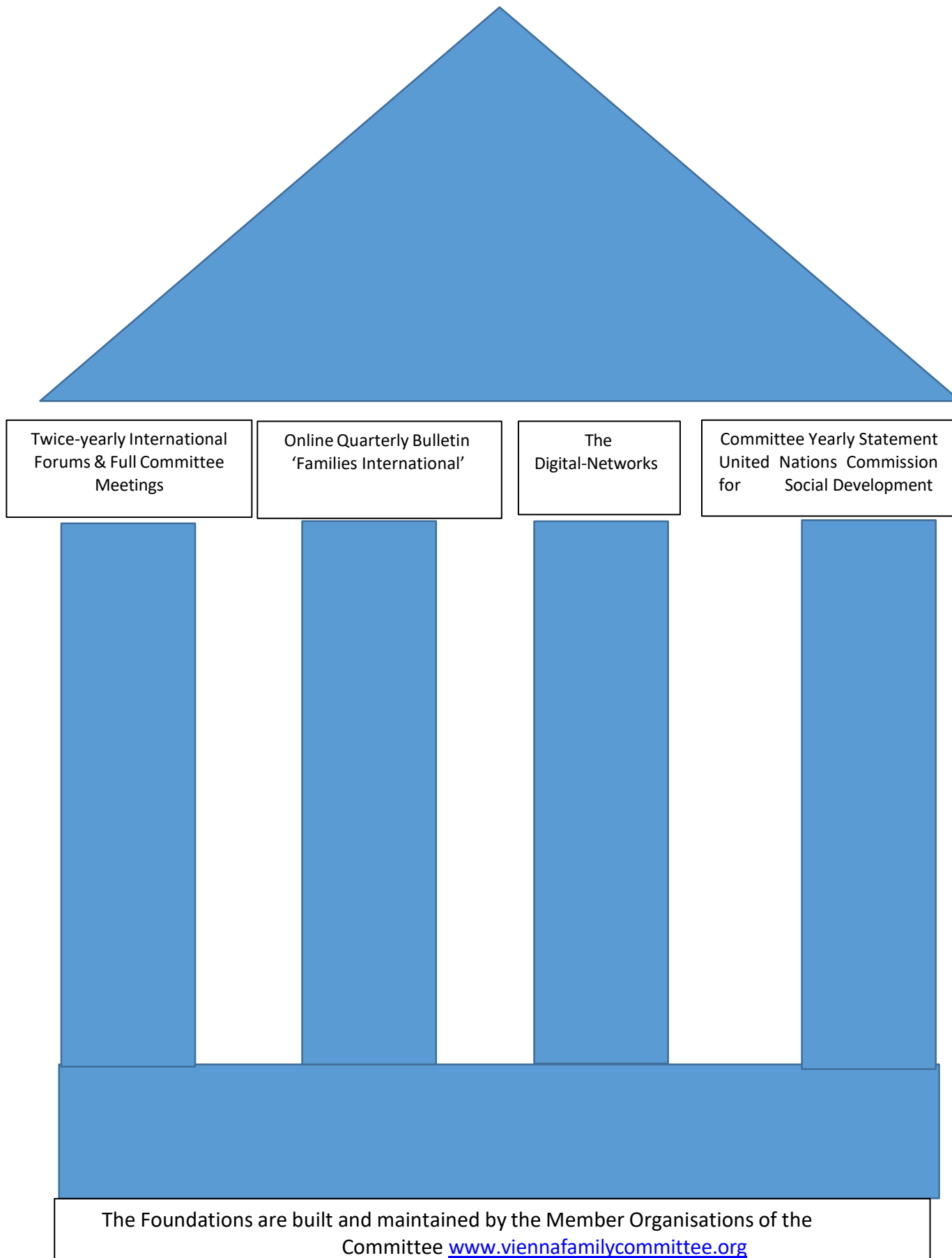
Julia Birner B.A., Families International,  
Christin Kohler M.A., Families International,  
Karin Kuzmanov M.Sc., Families International,  
Hannah Prüwasser B.A., Families International,  
Alexandra Pirker, Committee Co-Ordinator,  
United Nations Commission for Social Development,  
Dr. Eleonora Teixeira 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)  
**Chairperson: Valeria Foglar-Deinhardstein, M.Sc.**

**January 2025**  
[contact@viennafamilycommittee.org](mailto:contact@viennafamilycommittee.org)  
**Secretary: Peter Crowley, Ph.D.**

## **THE FOUR-PILLAR STRUCTURE OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE FAMILY**

The Roof is built and maintained by the Board of the Committee





**Statement to the Commission for Social Development (UNCSD)**

United Nations

E/CN.5/2025/NGO/



**Economic and Social Council**

Distr.: General  
13 November 2024

English only

**Commission for Social Development**

**Sixty-third session**

10–14 February 2025

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

**Priority Theme: “Strengthening solidarity, social inclusion  
and social cohesion to accelerate the delivery of the  
commitments of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social  
Development and Programme of Action of the World Summit  
for Social Development as well as the implementation of the  
2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”**

**Statement submitted by International Council of Women,  
European Union of Women, Kolping International, Make Mothers  
Matter, non-governmental organizations in consultative status  
with the Economic and Social Council and member organizations  
of the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family\***

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.

24-21126 (E)



Please recycle



## Statement

We, the undersigned international non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, and member organizations of the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family, recognize the need that several current events require both short and long-term responses and actions, in particular, to improve the situation in terms of strengthening solidarity, social inclusion and social cohesion.

In light of global political, economic and environmental challenges, we recognize that inequalities such as in education and resource distribution have a negative impact on the well-being of the population, and create an additional precarious and stressful situation for vulnerable groups, as well as for families. As a result, it is essential to strengthen existing strategies to mitigate social inequalities and to target further relief measures. In this context, solidarity and cooperation between nations is of great importance in order to comprehensively secure and promote the well-being of the population, with a particular focus on vulnerable groups.

Existing disparities have been exacerbated, particularly in countries that have been confronted with the effects of multiple crises, such as the impact of climate change or volatile local structures, with significant social and economic inequalities. The COVID-19 pandemic has deepened structural and systemic inequalities, particularly in the health and education sectors, thus increasing social inequality for vulnerable groups. As the Copenhagen Declaration emphasizes, holistic measures that address different levels of the existing global social problems must be taken, in order to establish a long-term and sustainable opportunity for social equality for all. According to the Copenhagen Declaration, social protection systems must be strengthened, and discrimination must be reduced in a targeted manner, in the interests of social inclusion and cohesion for all people, regardless of their personal circumstances.

In order to counteract social inequalities and thus ensure social inclusion for all, a focus must be placed on eliminating poverty, reducing inequalities and promoting gender equality, as the 2030 Agenda also recognizes. Achieving these goals requires far-reaching environmental, economic and social reforms that create a stable and equitable livelihood for all people. Tackling inequalities in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, migration biography, sexuality, disability, and other possible discrimination categories therefore needs to be at the forefront of these measures, as both the Copenhagen Declaration and the 2030 Agenda emphasize.

Ultimately, the creation of decent work and social justice for all must be achieved, as recognized by the Copenhagen Declaration and the 2030 Agenda. Solidarity and cooperation between highly industrialized and less industrialized countries is essential to combat poverty and inequality in all its forms and to ensure that the goals of both documents are successfully implemented.

From UNICEF Innocenti

## Data Must Speak



# Applying positive deviance in education

METHODOLOGICAL BRIEF

## What is positive deviance?

**Positive deviance identifies successful outliers to explore sustainable, scalable local solutions to complex problems.** The approach is grounded on the premise that in every community, there are often change agents who find better solutions to problems also faced by their peers in similar circumstances and with the same resources (Herington and van de Fliert, 2018). In research, positive deviance can be leveraged to highlight these exceptionally effective practices and success stories, which emerge even in challenging circumstances (Bradley et al., 2009).

[The Data Must Speak \(DMS\) positive deviance research](#) leverages a positive deviance approach to identify practices and behaviours of positive deviant schools, which are schools that outperform others despite operating in similar contexts and with similar resources.

The positive deviance approach consists of five phases presented in Table 1.

While the positive deviance approach originated in the fields of health and nutrition, it has also been used to address other complex social issues, ranging from female genital mutilation to sex trafficking and HIV risk behaviours (see Singhal and Dura, 2009; Pascale, Sternin and Sternin, 2010; Ober et al., 2018).

Table 1. Five phases of a positive deviance

Phase	Description
<b>Defining the problem</b>	Define the organizational or community <b>problem and desired outcomes</b> .
<b>Identifying positive outliers</b>	Determine the presence of <b>positive outliers</b> whose outcomes deviate significantly from those of their peers.
<b>Seeking bright spots</b>	Discover <b>successful behaviours and strategies</b> used by positive
<b>Engaging the community</b>	Community members engage in an action learning initiative, identifying opportunities to <b>practise the discovered behaviours</b> and defining ways to monitor progress.
<b>Monitoring, spreading and scaling</b>	Community members <b>monitor and evaluate the impact</b> of the newly introduced practices, and <b>communicate results</b> by sharing, honouring and amplifying success stories.

Source: Authors' own elaboration, adapted from Pascale, Sternin and Sternin (2010) and LeMahieu, Nordstrum and Gale (2017).

**Applications of positive deviance in the education sector remain limited, especially in low- and middle-income countries.**

However, examples do exist where positive deviance has been used in education to unlock new insights across diverse contexts. In Namibia and Mexico, positive deviance was used to identify schools that consistently showed better examination results, exploring what contributed to their performance in contexts where other schools struggled to perform (Namibia, Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, and United Nations Children’s Fund [UNICEF], 2016; Castillo Castro, 2018). Positive deviance in Argentina identified primary schools with low dropout rates and explored how this outcome was achieved (Singhal, 2013). Several studies from high-income countries have focused on positive deviant teachers and/or students, rather than schools (Shoenberger, Heckert and Heckert, 2015; Cheang and Goh, 2018). Lévano et al. (2022) provide a more comprehensive review of positive deviance in education.

**How can positive deviance be applied in the education sector?**

Despite substantial progress in access to education, 70 per cent of children in low- and middle-income countries are still not learning foundational skills. This pervasive problem in the education sector requires new approaches.

**Positive deviance can enable researchers, practitioners and policymakers to identify what local solutions are already being successfully implemented to address the learning crisis.** When dealing with intractable problems, externally identified ‘best practice’ solutions seem promising but may be unfit for the context. Positive deviance identifies ideas that are already being implemented in the context of interest and yield positive results, but may not be the norm (Samji et al., 2018). This approach can be applied to a range of problems in the education sector, including learning, gender equity, inclusion, socio-emotional well-being and governance issues.

**Positive deviants can be identified at various levels of the education system, including:**



**Individual**

*How does Ms. Grace’s grade 3 class have few student behaviour issues, while disciplinary issues in other teachers’ grade 3 classes have risen, despite all classes having similar resources and students with similar backgrounds?*

Identifying individual people (such as teachers, school leaders and students) who are doing something different to improve outcomes is one approach to positive deviance.



**School**

*How has a primary school in a rural area achieved high national examination scores for the third year in a row, when similar schools in the same community have seen their scores decline?*

Positive deviance can explore how various actors at the school may be contributing to its sustained learning performance.



**District or subnational**

*Why are completion rates for primary school girls in one district so high compared with peer districts, where dropout rates have increased?*

Existing analysis routinely undertaken by ministries of education (such as statistical bulletins of performance) can be used to identify the exceptional districts/provinces to learn from.

**Most positive deviance approaches in education have applied a statistical approach combined with local expertise to select positive outliers.** Existing data sets, including Education Management Information System (EMIS) data, national examinations and learning assessments, and even routine inspection data, can be leveraged. Approaches to positive deviance research are normally presented as:



A **'researcher-led' approach**, in which community participation is absent or limited to being the subject of data collection.



A **'community-led' approach**, in which community members are engaged in all aspects of the research, including the identification and/or validation of positive outliers. This approach entails engaging community members in the research instead of only extracting information from them (Lévano et al., 2022).

**Co-creation balances both approaches.**

Researchers work alongside ministry of education experts, local academics, school actors and other education partners to identify and validate positive outliers, discuss methods for data collection, and co-design data-collection instruments to ensure contextual relevance and alignment with local priorities. Evidence suggests that research co-created with policymakers is 17 to 20 percentage points more likely to result in policy change (Bonargent, 2024).

**After positive outliers have been identified, qualitative research methods are often used to explore what contributes to their success.**

Once positive deviants are identified, communities and/or researchers must then identify the local practices or solutions that contribute to their better performance. Such investigations have often been conducted through qualitative methods, leveraging in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and sometimes observations with a sample of relevant participants to capture their perspectives, experiences, practices and/or perceptions that can inform positive deviance.

A fuller review of positive deviance methodologies can be found in the [DMS Methodological Review](#).

## Applying positive deviance in the Data Must Speak research

The DMS research developed its own innovative positive deviance approach centred on co-creation, employing the five phases previously presented that can be applied in other use cases:



### 1. Addressing the learning crisis and defining desired outcomes.

The DMS research defined two desired outcomes for education systems to overcome challenges: (1) schools retaining students and supporting their progression through the primary education cycle; and (2) schools supporting students to acquire foundational learning skills. These outcomes informed the indicators of good school performance, which DMS defined as school-average **student promotion rates**<sup>1</sup> and/or **standardized national examination scores at the end of primary school**.<sup>2</sup>



### 2. Identifying positive deviant schools through statistical methods and validation with in-country stakeholders.<sup>3</sup>

The DMS research utilizes EMIS data and, where available, national examination data to identify positive deviant schools in a country, using at least three years of data to ensure consistent performance over time. Econometric regression models are used to predict school performance against the defined outcome indicator(s). The models control for contextual features of schools, such as region, school inputs and average teacher profiles, to ensure differences in school performance cannot be attributed to differences in resources.<sup>4</sup> Once the data are reviewed and validated and extreme

<sup>1</sup> In some DMS countries, such as Zambia and Ghana, automatic promotion policies result in limited variation in performance between schools, suggesting that student promotion rates are not a suitable performance indicator.

<sup>2</sup> Ideally, positive deviant schools both retain children in school (high promotion rate) and teach them essential skills (examination performance). Where data was available, both indicators were used to select positive deviant schools.

<sup>3</sup> Technical annexes with details on positive deviant school selection can be found in each country-level DMS report accessible on the [DMS website](#).

DATA MUST SPEAK **METHODOLOGICAL BRIEF**

outliers are removed, schools with the highest positive differences between their actual and predicted performance are selected as positive deviant schools (see Figure 2). Each positive deviant school is then paired with a comparison school as similar as possible in observable characteristics from EMIS data, often in the same region and/or district, but whose performance is within the average expected given its resources and context. Pairing schools with comparable observable characteristics helps to ensure that primary data collected explores what EMIS data cannot, capturing what positive deviant schools do differently to contribute to their performance.

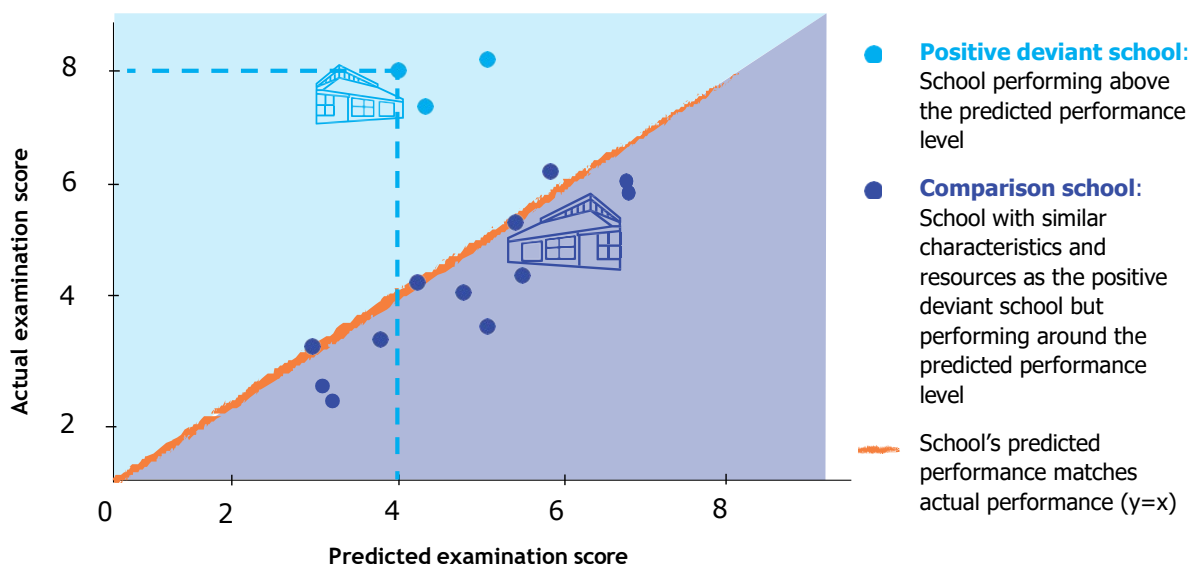


**3. Seeking to understand the behaviours and practices of positive deviant schools through mixed-methods primary data collection.**

In most partner countries, the DMS research uses a mixed-methods approach for primary

data collection that is co-created with ministry colleagues and relevant education stakeholders. While quantitative instruments examine factors not typically reported in administrative education data sets, qualitative instruments allow for further exploration of these factors and their underlying behavioural drivers. The DMS research engages different school stakeholders in data collection, including head teachers, teachers, students, parents and caregivers, parent management structures and/or middle-tier actors. On average, approximately 940 participants are reached through quantitative methods and 662 are reached through qualitative methods. Data analysis focuses on differences in practices and behaviours between positive deviant schools and their comparison school peers, exploring the domains of school leadership and management, teachers' pedagogical practices, school climate,<sup>5</sup> community engagement and decentralized administration. Analysis also focuses on practices and behaviours being adopted that may specifically support gender equality, equity and inclusion.

Figure 2. Example of positive deviant and comparison schools identified from a regression model on expected versus actual examination scores



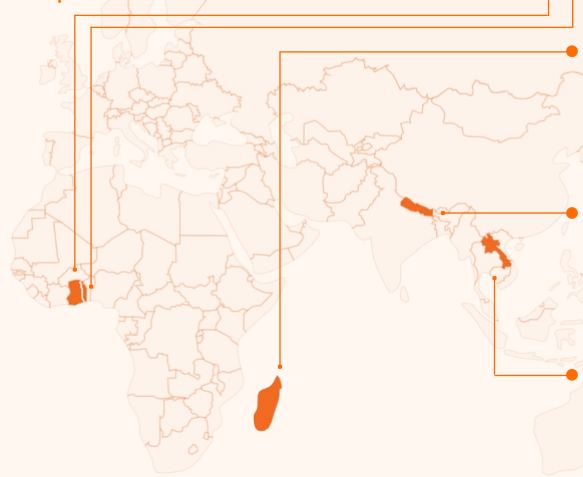
Source: Author's own elaboration.

<sup>4</sup> Region and year fixed effects were included in regression models to account for inherent differences between various contexts and across years.

<sup>5</sup> While school climate can include various components, the DMS research explores dynamics and relationships between different school actors, mechanisms for collaboration and support, perceptions of well-being and safety at the school, and issues such as gender equality or the presence of violence and bullying.

## Box 1. What practices and behaviours contribute to positive deviant school performance?

Evidence from DMS partner countries demonstrates that actors from positive deviant schools adopt a variety of practices and behaviours that support teaching, learning and overall school functioning. Evidence from all participating DMS countries can be found [here](#). Some examples include:



- In **Ghana**, teachers in positive deviant schools are more likely to support each other by developing lesson plans together.
- Teachers in **Togo's** positive deviant schools dedicate time to regularly communicate with families on issues related to student behaviour.
- Communities play a more active role in the financial management of positive deviant schools in **Madagascar**, especially regarding payments for unsubsidized teachers.
- In **Nepal**, decentralized education officers more regularly visit positive deviant schools and focus their support on teaching and learning.
- Principals in the **Lao People's Democratic Republic's** positive deviant schools more frequently observe teachers, provide feedback on their instruction and involve them in decision-making.



**4. Engaging education stakeholders to identify opportunities for scaling practices and behaviours, applying insights from behavioural sciences.** A validation of the practices and behaviours of positive deviant schools is held in each country, engaging ministry of education officials, education partners and school-level actors. Further primary data collection in positive deviant schools and with key actors in the education system at both the central and decentralized levels creates an opportunity to disseminate the research results while also helping to explain the emergence of positive deviant practices by identifying their enabling conditions and behavioural drivers.



**5. Exploring pathways to spread and scale practices and behaviours identified.** Leveraging insights from the school, decentralized and central

levels, the DMS research also investigates the political economy opportunities for scaling these local innovations, and articulates concrete policy actions that can be employed to drive change and promote the adoption of positive deviant practices more broadly. In partnership with ministry of education officials and key education stakeholders, a scaling plan is developed, outlining why, how and in what circumstances these behaviours and practices could be further disseminated and optimally scaled. While the DMS research is currently unable to monitor or evaluate the extent to which scaling pathways are implemented or behaviours and practices are adopted by school actors, implementation science could be leveraged to understand how to best promote their uptake and adoption. DMS's use of co-creation approaches from the outset supports national ownership and buy-in to take scaling forward.

## Considerations for leveraging positive deviance approaches



### **Balancing researcher-led and community-engaged approaches.**

At the core of the DMS research is co-creation with key stakeholders, such as education authorities, school actors and community members throughout the research journey. This included hosting various workshops and technical sessions with relevant country stakeholders, providing background on the research methodologies and posing questions so that participants could define what positive deviance means in their respective contexts. Robust statistical approaches were used in collaboration with country-level stakeholders' knowledge at the early stages of the research to ensure that selected schools were correctly identified as positive deviant outliers.



**Taking a holistic view of performance when identifying positive outliers while acknowledging data limitations.** School performance depends on factors such as community engagement and student-level performance, which stem from complex interactions of family and non-family influences on child development. Schools are also part of broader societal contexts shaped by social norms, cultural values, political stability and government efficiency, all of which can affect performance. While primary data collection at positive deviant and comparison schools can explore these factors, limitations in data availability at the outset present a challenge in selecting positive outliers. For example, the socio-emotional well-being of students could be an indicator of school performance beyond academic outcomes, but routine data is often not available at the national level. Use of these indicators as measures of performance may rely on community-led approaches to identifying positive outliers.



**Strengthening the identification of positive deviant schools through data triangulation and multiple years of data.** School performance can vary from one year to the next. For example, good performance on a national examination may be the result of well-informed practices and behaviours of that school, or it could result from a particularly strong cohort of students that sat for examinations that year. Using multiple years of data can ensure that positive deviants show consistently strong performance over time.



**Generating actionable insights from positive deviance approaches, moving from the 'what' to 'so what'.** Positive deviance enables identification of practices and behaviours, but the challenge lies in scaling these practices within a community or broader ecosystem. Scaling these cost-effective, readily implementable solutions requires careful consideration of social dynamics and political opportunities that can facilitate or hinder scaling efforts (see UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight, forthcoming). Positive deviance relies heavily on community engagement and buy-in to promote the adoption and mobilization of identified practices and achieve behavioural change. Dedicated resources may be needed to implement social and behaviour change approaches, which could include sensitization workshops, communications campaigns or tactics informed by behavioural science, such as nudges (see UNICEF, 2024). Context also matters, as specific practices and behaviours may not be easily transposed from one community to another.



## Why use positive deviance approaches to contribute to evidence-informed decision-making in education?



**Local actors are often best placed to identify and develop solutions that are both contextually relevant to and rooted in the specific needs of their communities.** The success of the DMS positive deviance research is rooted in its empowerment of community-driven, context-specific solutions to education challenges. The research leverages existing data sets that are often overlooked to identify these local solutions, which have already proven cost-effective and readily implementable, and are more likely to be sustainably scaled since they are rooted in local realities. The positive deviance approach has helped ministries of education to better recognize teachers, school leaders and communities as powerful change agents and incubators of innovative solutions for learning, equity and inclusion.

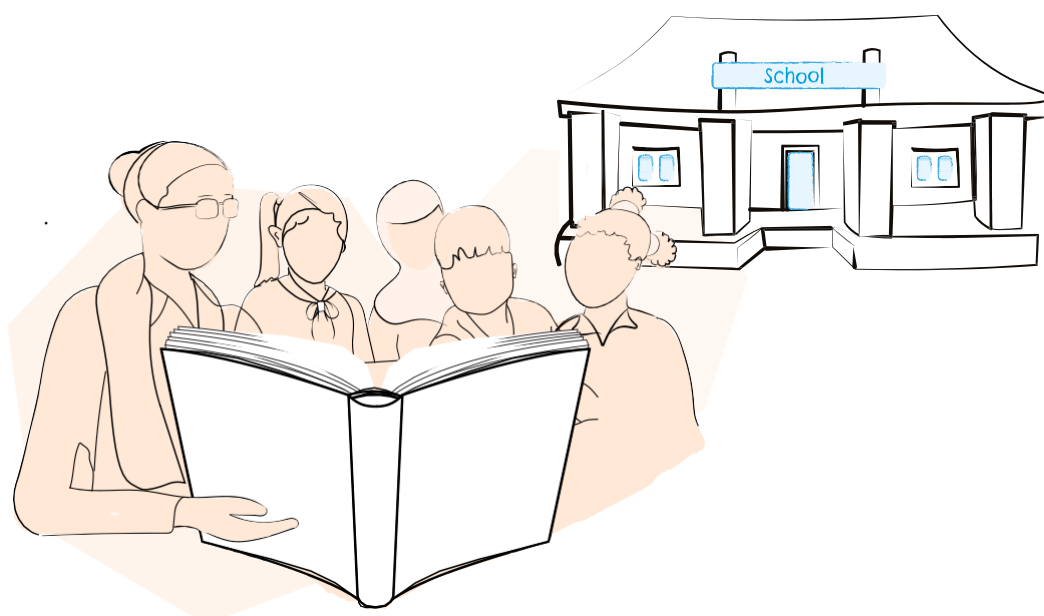


**Valuing local knowledge is a necessary shift in education research.** The DMS research team recognized the importance of not simply

conducting research on subjects but also ensuring that relevant stakeholders were meaningfully engaged throughout the research process. The aim of DMS from the outset has been to create an inclusive and empowering research environment that informs decision-making while acknowledging the local capacities and knowledge that exist across all levels of the education system.



**By embracing a positive deviance approach, education actors identify 'what works' locally and sheds light on positive progress and efforts made.** This approach illuminates the efforts that school actors are making to improve learning and education outcomes in their contexts, spotlighting positive progress and effort being made amid challenges. Positive deviance approaches can provide a blueprint for ensuring that evidence-informed decisions are rooted in proven strategies and a deep understanding of the diverse contexts in which they are implemented.



## References

- Bonargent, Alix, *Can Research with Policymakers Change the World?*, n.p., 2024.
- Bradley, Elizabeth H., et al., 'Research in Action: Using positive deviance to improve quality of health care', *Implementation Science*, vol. 4, no. 25, 2009.
- Castillo Castro, Catalina, 'Teacher Practices in Primary Schools with High Value-Added Scores and Engaging Lessons in Disadvantaged Communities in Rural Mexico', PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2018.
- Cheang, Chelsea J. Y., and Esther C. L. Goh, 'Why Some Children from Poor Families Do Well: An in-depth analysis of positive deviance cases in Singapore', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*, vol. 13, sup1, 2018.
- Herington, Matthew. J., and Elske van de Fliert, 'Positive Deviance in Theory and Practice: A conceptual review', *Deviant Behavior*, vol. 39, no. 5, 2018, pp. 664–678.
- LeMahieu, Paul G., Lee E. Nordstrum and Dick Gale, 'Positive Deviance: Learning from positive anomalies', *Quality Assurance in Education*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2017, pp. 109–124.
- Lévano, L. et al., *A Methodological Review for the Data Must Speak Positive Deviance Research: Insights from positive deviance, behavioural sciences, implementation research, and scaling science*, UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, Florence, 2022.
- Namibia, Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, and United Nations Children's Fund, *"We Are the Architects of Our Own Destiny!": Study of positive deviant schools in Namibia*, Windhoek, 2016.
- Ober, Allison J., et al., 'Using a "Positive Deviance" Framework to Discover Adaptive Risk Reduction Behaviors Among High-Risk HIV Negative Black Men Who Have Sex with Men', *AIDS and Behavior*, vol. 22, no. 5, 2018, pp. 1699–1712.
- Pascale, Richard, Jerry Sternin and Monique Sternin, *The Power of Positive Deviance: How unlikely innovators solve the world's toughest problems*, Harvard Business Press, Boston, 2010.
- Samji, Salimah, et al. *PDIA Toolkit: A DIY approach to solving complex problems*, Center for International Development, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2018.
- Shoenberger, Nicole, Alex Heckert and Druann Heckert, 'Labeling, Social Learning, and Positive Deviance: A look at high achieving students', *Deviant Behavior*, vol. 36, no. 6, 2015, pp. 474–491.
- Singhal, Arvind, 'Transforming Education from the Inside Out: Positive deviance to enhance learning and student retention', ch. 9 in *A Feast of Learning: International perspectives on adult learning and change*, edited by Roger Hiemstra and Philippe Caree, Information Age Publishing, Charlotte, NC, 2013, pp. 141–159.
- Singhal, Arvind, and Lucia Dura, *Protecting Children from Exploitation and Trafficking: Using the positive deviance approach in Uganda and Indonesia*, Save the Children, n.p., 2009.
- UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight, 'Data Must Speak: Embedding scaling science in education research', Methodological Brief, UNICEF Innocenti, Florence, forthcoming.
- United Nations Children's Fund, 'Social + Behaviour Change', UNICEF, New York, 2024, <<https://sbcguidance.org/>>, accessed 13 November 2024.

## About the Data Must Speak positive deviance research

The [DMS positive deviance research](#) leverages existing data to identify positive deviant schools, explores the behaviours and practices contributing to their success, and examines pathways for scaling these practices to more schools in a given context. The DMS research empowers school actors and policymakers with practical insights on 'what works' to improve learning, even in challenging circumstances.

The DMS research is co-created with ministries of education, UNICEF country offices and local education partners. It is currently being implemented in 15 countries across Africa, Asia and Latin America. The research is made possible thanks to a coalition of donors: Jacobs Foundation, Global Partnership for Education/ International Development Research Centre Knowledge and Innovation Exchange, Hewlett Foundation, Jacobs Foundation, Norad, Schools2030 initiative (Aga Khan Foundation) and UNICEF internal resources.

## About this series

This brief was written by Jessica Bergmann and Ryan Shawn Herman (UNICEF Innocenti). It is a part of a broader series that describes innovative methodologies and approaches used by the DMS positive deviance research. This series aims to support researchers, practitioners and policymakers to consider how they may leverage new approaches to address critical challenges in education.

## Suggested citation

UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight, 'Data Must Speak: Applying positive deviance in education', Methodological Brief, UNICEF Innocenti, Florence, December 2024.

for every child, answers



*From Member Organisations of the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family*

# Family-Centered Cities

Urban Planning Response to Family Needs

1 February 2025



148

**ifd papers**

The family is the most basic unit of society and is important to the growth of cities and societies. Urban planning is essential in catering to these diverse needs of families and society at large and shaping environments in cities and communities.

This paper explores how urban planning can respond to family needs amid the reality of rapid urbanization. Drawing from the Family Systems Theory, it explores the interconnected relationship between family dynamics and external urban environments emphasizing the importance of inclusive and participatory approaches in urban design.

The paper also briefly analyzes a successful case study of Curitiba's family-centered urban planning. By focusing on the challenges that envelope present urban environments, the paper hopes to show the opportunity this offers for the future of urbanization and family well-being.

The findings underscore the benefits and need for holistic urban strategies which place families at the center as it ensures equitable and thriving urban futures for all. The findings are insights that urban planners, policy makers,

The Venice Declaration emphasizes that families are key agents of development and calls for inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities. Priorities include healthcare, education, housing, safety, and leisure. [1]

These recommendations guide governments and urban planners in creating equitable urban environments where families can thrive.

Urban planning should ensure access to services, promote social participation, foster intergenerational interaction, and strengthen social cohesion. This is especially crucial as [2] projects two-thirds of the global population will live in urban areas by 2050.

Samita Mwanicky, 4th year Development Studies and Philosophy student at Strathmore University, Kenya.

governments and individuals can use to ensure holistic and participatory approaches are central in urban development to ensure the prosperity of all people in society and future generations.

Urban planning draws from various fields such as engineering, architecture, and other technical fields to develop open lands and revitalize them in a manner that grows a town or city. Urban environments have increasingly become concrete jungles, and the well-being of people is seldom considered. Green public spaces and decent and affordable housing have alarmingly become a commodity rather than a human right.

With rapid urbanization worldwide, urban planning's focus on physical forms and economic functions are being challenged. It is observed that rapid urbanization often results in the growth of urban poverty which disproportionately affects families and children. [3] This shows the impact of urbanization on families and insights from the basic needs that families need to pay for often come at a higher cost which makes it difficult to address the urban phenomenon of child poverty and exclusion. [4]

There is a need to revive the importance of a family-centered approach in our urbanizing spaces because the challenges of unsustainable rapid urbanization are rising and family needs are neglected, leaving little room for inclusive urban design. This however provides a unique known as an urban dividend, which refers to viewing urbanization as a window of opportunity to improve people's wellbeing when planning is properly undertaken.

This consequently calls for a response to integrate inclusive urban design that is more environmentally conscious, pivoting away from primarily economic pull factors. This inequality problem can be further addressed through the Family Systems Theory as a guiding framework which will be used as a grounding concept for this paper and help in addressing socioeconomic impacts on families due to urban planning. This can ensure urban planning is more participatory which proves a pivotal opportunity for local governments to invest in children, families and sustainable urbanization today.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The Family Systems Theory emphasizes the interconnectedness of family members and their interactions with external environment, such as built environments and urban planning which foster healthy dynamics in families.[5] There are

limited specific studies linking the Family Systems Theory to urban planning but the theory's emphasis on the broader social context aligns with the understanding that external environments significantly impact the family systems. Applying this theory therefore involves recognizing how the structures and designs of built environments can influence family interactions, cohesion and general wellbeing.[6] This theory also presupposes that families are adaptive systems and their interactions with external factors can either hinder or support family functions.

With the above in mind, pairing the above theory and the concept of urban divided can result in urban planning playing a significant role in shaping external environments to positively impact the wellbeing of family structures in society. The Family Systems Theory calls our attention to addressing family needs like green spaces, community infrastructure, and quality housing to support healthy family dynamics.

Conversely with insights from [7], poorly urban planned environments characterized by overcrowding, unsafe conditions, and lack of basic amenities disrupt family cohesion and hinder overall development. Applying the Family Systems Theory to urban planning can necessitate designing more inclusive environments to foster intergenerational interactions, support holistic wellbeing, and promote family stability.

### **Family-Centered Urban Planning**

The family perspective is important because it offers a more holistic view of the future of urban planning. Rapid urbanization calls for retrofitting existing urban spaces to accommodate growing populations. This adds strain to resources due to overcrowding and housing shortages, a consequence of rapid urban growth that leads to many families living in urban slums, or informal settlements which lack basic amenities such as access to clean water, public transportation, good hospitals, good schools, and other necessary infrastructure.[8]

This naturally creates another challenge for people to access essential services, especially in underserved areas. The common value judgment that urbanization and prosperity are synonymous contradicts current trends of urbanization. Family-centered urban planning addresses challenges like overcrowding, social disconnection, and lack of amenities as urban designs prioritize catering to holistic needs of families. Through participatory planning processes which involve families in decision-making also ensures urban de-

signs reflect family needs. [9]

Drawing from the success of Brazil's Curitiba city which is family-centered, the model shows the importance of designing spaces which foster social cohesion and intergenerational interactions and prioritizing accessibility to essential services. Most importantly, it shows the perks of engaging communities in the planning process to address their unique needs. [10] This example proves the capability of urban planning to address challenges of families under threat of rapid urbanization today.

Curitiba as a city embodies the success of a participatory approach and embodies the possibility that families everywhere can access clean drinking water, affordable housing, public transportation, education, health, culture, safety, green and public spaces, and pollution-free living environments provides supporting evidence from longitudinal and cross-sectional studies which suggests neighborhood social cohesion may protect against the adverse mental health effects of growing up in poverty, both for children and young people and adult populations. Isolation and lack of community ties in urban areas can contribute to mental health issues among family members, including children. [11] This also threatens the well-being of older generations and young people. The lack of recreational facilities and care for the elderly threatens the aspect of integration in urban communities.

This argument draws from the erosion of traditional family structures because of the lack of secure urban environments and infrastructure that encourages intergenerational interaction which can improve social cohesion between generations. The need to design cities to accommodate generations can help people feel part of a larger community.

### **Child Responsive Urban Planning**

Child poverty and exclusion are to an increasing extent becoming an urban occurrence due to urban employment alone in areas like the global South which operates in the informal economy, depicted by lack of access to legal and social protection, low pay, and instability. Worth noting, women and the poor make up a disproportionate share of the urban informal workforce. Informal settlements, informal employment, and informal provision of services exacerbate poverty and inequality in cities. [12] This brings about income disparities which affect the ability of families to afford housing and other necessities. In so far as cities offer job opportunities, they also present challenges such as job insecurity and informal

employment which impact family stability.

With megatrends explored by demographic shifts, climate change and other changes including urbanization show the need to make cities more safe, resilient, inclusive, and sustainable for families in the face of extreme estimates of over 300 million of the global population of slum dwellers being children. [13] With children making up one third of the global population, there is an urgency to incorporate child-friendly designs in urban areas especially in areas like sub-Saharan Africa which have a higher proportion of children. Worth noting, sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia have higher rates of urbanization and urban settings increasingly become the context in which many children grow up in. [14] This necessitates urban environments incorporating opportunities to improve the family's wellbeing and address the needs of children in a manner that can support their development to thrive and build an environment conducive to be homes for future generations. Mouratidis shows that a city can shape the levels of subjective wellbeing of people as people use several functions and areas in the city and not just in their neighborhood. [15] This translates to access to open, natural, and green spaces within urban spaces which facilitate social interaction and overall, improve safety.

The aspect of attaining higher wellbeing is connected to good health and longevity which speaks to the need to create a space in which access to health care, physical activities in nature and greener spaces is available to all. This is one way in which urban planning can intentionally create opportunities to foster a sense of community among populations.

Building on the principles of children's rights it can encourage inclusive urban design in a world where most cities are solely built to primarily respond to the needs of adults neglecting an urban childhood which can foster a better life for children in urban settings. Urban planning can improve social cohesion and intergenerational interactions within recreational areas. Aside from providing a safe and engaging environment necessary for a child's development, there is also a need to ensure all children can access quality services such as education and hospital. Most importantly, traffic safety measures implemented within structures of urban areas can protect children and adults from urban hazards.

Equity focused approaches are necessary to prioritize the needs of vulnerable children, especially around informal settlements. This can be achieved through a participatory approach which can ensure specific needs are addressed which in

turn, promotes inclusive urban development.

## Conclusion

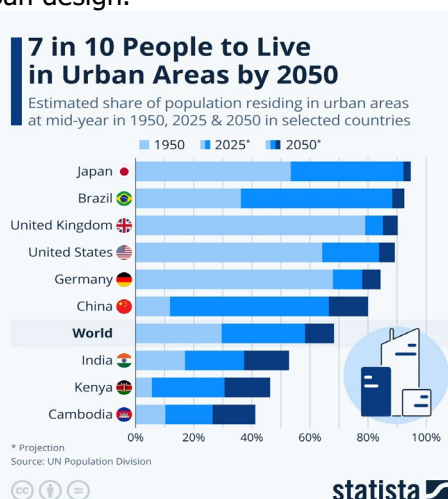
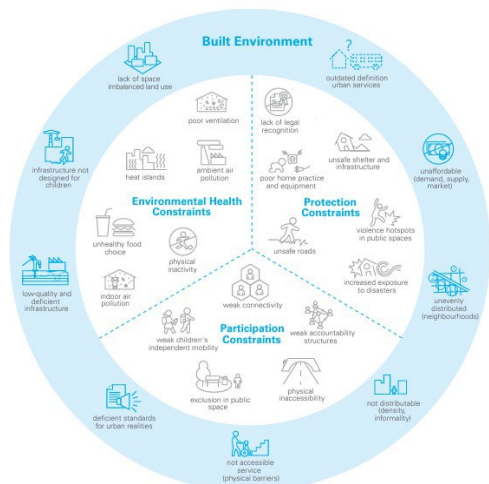
This paper may not have deeply explored the role of policy in addressing key challenges but clearly shows how urbanization significantly impacts family dynamics which often lead to challenges like access to essential services, erosion of traditional support systems and overcrowding which places pressure on existing resources. Children are often the victims of these disproportions, as well as vulnerable populations. The paper began by noting the rapid pace of urbanization as a reality and its impact on the most basic unit of society, the family. It also highlighted the benefits of a family centered approach in urban planning to prioritize family wellbeing more than ever amidst these rapid changes.

Research advocates for a child-responsive approach to urban planning which speaks to pri-

macy of family in urban planning. It emphasizes the creation of more inclusive, safe and sustainable environments which can promote the wellbeing of families. Urbanization also presents a unique opportunity, an 'urban dividend' to improve lives through participatory planning and investment in child friendly cities. By focusing on access to essential services, social cohesion, and intergenerational interaction, urban planners can support families to thrive within urban settings.

This paper calls for a shift from prioritizing economic gains to implementing holistic urban development strategies with the family at the center. It also calls for further research on the impact of family-centered approach in urban design and how it realizes the urban dividend or intergenerational interaction. This way, urban planning and development can encourage sustainable development within more cities by showing the benefits of more equitable access to resources and the long-term impact of adopting a more inclusive urban design.

Figure 9: Taxonomy of children's vulnerabilities related to the built environment



[1] citiesforfamilies.org

[2] UNDESA, 2018.

[3] Bas, D., 2022, UN-DESA, <https://www.un.org/en/un-chronicle/urbanization-and-families>

[4] UNICEF, 2021, [https://www.unicef.org/evaluation/blog/why-equity-and-inclusion-should-be-core-unicefs-urban-programming-unequal-cities#\\_ednref4](https://www.unicef.org/evaluation/blog/why-equity-and-inclusion-should-be-core-unicefs-urban-programming-unequal-cities#_ednref4)

[5] Bouchrika, I., 2024, <https://research.com/education/what-is-systems-theory?>

[6] Cohen, I. S., 2023, Psychology Today: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/your-emotional-meter/202311/understanding-bowen-family-systems-theory?>

[7] UNICEF, 2021

[8] Bas, 2022.

[9] Claire Nelischer, A. L.-S., 2022, Sage Journals,

<https://journals.sagepub.com.ezproxy.library.strathmore.edu/doi/full/10.1177/08854122221092175?>

[10] Adler, D. (2016, May 6). The Guardian . Retrieved from The Guardian : <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/may/06/story-of-cities-37-mayor-jaime-lerner-curitiba-brazil-green-capital-global-icon?>

[11] Fone, D. W., Cambridge University Press, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291713003255>

[12] UNICEF, 2021.

[13] <https://familyperspective.org/2023/02/23/civil-society-declaration-30th-anniversary-of-the-international-year-of-the-family/>

[14] Habitat, 2020, [https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/10/wcr\\_2020\\_report.pdf](https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/10/wcr_2020_report.pdf)

[15] Mouratidis. K.. 2021.

February 2025



## MMM ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE MOTHERS' ROLE AND RIGHTS

### A Just Transition Must Support Unpaid Care Work– MMM Answers to Call for Input for UN Report on Just Transition and Human Rights

A “**just transition**” is a framework used in the context of addressing climate change to ensure that the shift to a sustainable, low-carbon economy is fair and equitable, supporting people, communities and industries affected by the change.

Globally, women continue to shoulder more than 3/4 of unpaid domestic and care work, an inequitable distribution that remains at the root of gender inequalities: it is a cause of much discrimination and the main barrier to women’s full participation in the economy and in politics, their access to decision-making positions, and the realisation of many of their human rights, including their right to health and decent work.

**Because climate change, like most crises, exacerbates these care-rooted inequalities, a just transition must recognise and address the disproportionate impact that climate change and other environmental crises have on the unpaid family care work shouldered by women, in particular mothers. Make Mothers Matter fully supports [UNRISD and the Just Transition and Care Network’s call](#) that a just transition must be care-centred.**

MMM also sees **gender-responsive climate action** as an opportunity for achieving the recognition and redistribution of the unpaid work, responsibilities and costs of caring, including caring for the environment.

**MMM’s answer** to the [call for input issued by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights \(OHCHR\)](#) for its report therefore **highlights examples of promising commitments, laws, policies and practices** that address the unpaid care work issue and that, in MMM’s view, should be part of a just transition. These are mostly from the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) region, and the European Union and its Member States, and focus on:

- the recognition of care as a right and as a common and shared responsibility
- the recognition of unpaid care work as productive and valuable work
- the establishment of national care systems.

MMM also highlights the key role of the private sector, as well as grassroots organisations working with and for mothers, which must be properly supported.

**Last but not least, a just transition requires a profound transformation of our economic and social systems: these must be repurposed to prioritise human rights, the well-being of both people and the planet, as well as inclusion, sustainability and equity in all policy-making – with care at its centre. In other words, a just transition cannot happen without “shifting from a care-less to a care-full economic system”.**

Read [MMM’s full contribution](#).

---

**Make Mothers Matter (MMM) – Paris, France**

Contact: [mmmi@makemothersmatter.org](mailto:mmmi@makemothersmatter.org) – [makemothersmatter.org](http://makemothersmatter.org)



## From Local to Global: Practical Solutions to Better Support Mothers – MMM Answers to Call for Input of UN WG on Discriminations against Women and Girls

To inform the 2025 report of the UN Working Group on discriminations against women and girls on the **gendered dimensions of care and support**, MMM responded to the questions addressed in their [call for input](#) and provided information on existing good practices in terms of policies and programmes at the international, regional, national and local levels.

While the COVID-19 pandemic uncovered the critical role of both paid and unpaid care work, global policies continue to lag behind in addressing the economic and social penalties that caregivers face. Our societies and economic policy-making continue to prioritise growth over care and well-being.

Still, several countries are more advanced, particularly in Latin America, and offer possible paths forward and interesting examples to build on.

### Examples of good care policies

- At the legislative level, Ecuador has enshrined in its Constitution the **right to care** which entails protection for both caregivers and care receivers. At the municipal level, care is also recognised as a right in the Constitution of Mexico City.
- The current care crisis requires holistic thinking. It is necessary to work across sectors, considering care in economic, labour, health and education policies. This is what several Latin American countries have done by developing **national care systems** involving different ministries. Uruguay was the first in 2015 to build a National Integrated System of Care to develop care services, improve the training of care providers and induce a cultural transformation of society. Other countries like Argentina and Chile are following suit.
- At the local level, municipalities are also key players in developing new solutions. Colombia's capital Bogota is a good example with its "**Care Blocks**" around the city, which are designed to make all essential care-related services accessible, provide relief to caregivers and support them in their caregiving responsibilities.
- Child care policies are key to supporting mothers, and as part of its answer, MMM welcomes the revision of the EU **Barcelona Targets** which came with the [2022 EU Care Strategy](#). However, not only should quality childcare be accessible to all families, but policies should also ensure that it is not limited to crèche, and instead offer various solutions to address the diversity of family needs. Early particular childhood is a key period during which accompaniment by parents and childcare professionals needs to be secured. Still, in many countries, the cost of childcare remains too high to allow every household to choose to resort to it or not. It therefore often condemns mothers to stay at home to compensate for insufficient public services.
- Ensuring that young children receive quality care also starts with providing properly remunerated maternity, paternity and parental leave to support parents in assuming their care responsibility during the critical early months of the child. The [2019 EU Work Life Balance Directive](#) provides a first step in the right direction by obliging Member States to introduce a minimum of 10 working days of paternity leave, an important lever to induce a more equal sharing of care responsibilities within families.

However, MMM believes that **maternity protection** should be granted to all mothers without conditionality, whereas it is usually linked to formal employment. As a result, nearly half of mothers with newborns do not receive maternity cash benefits. This gap has to be addressed because it can put mothers – and their children – in precarious situations.

### Promising initiatives

Lone mothers are particularly vulnerable to poverty because the unpaid domestic, care and educational work they shoulder on their own limits their ability to dedicate enough time to a formal paid activity. They ought to benefit from tailored support. As an example of good practice, the municipality of Ris Orangis in France has

created a **municipal status for single parents** that provides specific rights and benefits to facilitate their daily lives and their access to childcare, employment and housing.

To facilitate mothers' access or return to work, a promising avenue is the recognition and validation of the skills that they gain through caring for and educating their children. The **MAV (Mom Virtual Assistant) Project** is an EU initiative which is a good example to build on: it not only helps mothers acquire new digital and entrepreneurial skills, but also leverages the unique soft skills they have gained through motherhood to empower and elevate them professionally.

Last but not least, MMM's answer to the call for input also highlights **good practices** by [MMM's grassroots member associations](#). In particular, the [Mother Centres International Network for Empowerment \(MINE\)](#) supports mothers by providing spaces where they can meet, share experiences, help each other, and find relief and support. Many of MMM's members also provide training and support to lone mothers in Morocco ([Ahddane](#)), Uruguay ([CeprodiH](#)), Spain ([Fundación Isadora Duncan](#)), Kenya ([Passion to Share Foundation](#)) and the Netherlands ([Single SuperMom](#)).

These various examples of policies and programmes at the international, national and grassroots levels show promising pathways for progress. Decision-makers hold a responsibility in addressing the gendered dimensions of care, recognising that the well-being of caregivers and care receivers is the backbone of a healthy society and a functioning economy.

Read [MMM's full contribution to the UN WG's report](#).

## **Mothers Must Be Recognised and Supported as Essential Drivers of Social Development – MMM Statement to 63rd UN CSD**

Despite calling for placing “people at the centre of development” – recognising families and women as key agents of social development – and committing to fulfilling “our responsibility for present and future generations”, most signatory States to the [1995 Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action](#) fail to acknowledge the specific contribution of mothers, and to intentionally enable their transformative potential. In today's world, not only is mothering usually unsupported and undervalued, but it also happens in an environment of policies and social norms that often penalises mothers.

**As the primary educators and caregivers of the generation to come, mothers play an essential role in ensuring social development. Their well-being is therefore crucial to ensure that their children grow up in a safe, healthy and nurturing environment and can develop to their full potential to be able to contribute to society later in life. Child-rearing, household management and caring are the backbone of a functioning society.**

Yet, the inequitable distribution of the unpaid work of caring and educating children, which is mainly performed by mothers, remains a barrier to gender equity and achieving social development.

Mothers and children are amongst the most vulnerable to poverty, social exclusion, and violence. The multiple and intersecting global crises we face increase their unpaid care work and responsibilities and exacerbate these vulnerabilities. When priorities shift from providing public services to debt servicing, mothers pay the highest price. When austerity policies reduce investment in healthcare, education or social protection, mothers have to adapt and perform the work public services no longer provide. Environmental degradation and climate change also affect women disproportionately.

The Copenhagen Declaration puts human well-being at its core. In order to ensure communities' sustainable well-being and prosperity, it is imperative to recognise that it can only be achieved if mothers, who nurture and raise the adults of tomorrow, are given proper space and means to thrive.

The right of women to fully participate in all areas of life regardless of their maternal status is also a matter of social justice. Women should not be penalised for being mothers. To create more equitable and inclusive societies, one needs to properly recognise, value and support unpaid care work, and promote a more equitable distribution of this vital work.

Although not explicit in the Copenhagen Declaration, unpaid care work is crucial to achieving its goals.

**MMM's written statement to the Commission calls upon decision-makers to prioritise policies that recognise and support the invaluable work of caregivers, beginning with mothers. As preparations begin for a 2nd World Summit on Social Development (to be held in November 2025 in Qatar), it also offers recommendations to centre care in all policy-making towards the realisation of the 10 commitments of the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration.**

Access [MMM's full written statement](#).

## **Early Childhood Interventions: Crucial for the Empowerment of Mothers of Children with Disabilities**

The [European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities \(EASPD\)](#), in collaboration with various family rights networks, including MMM, has issued a **position paper on [Family-centred Early Childhood Intervention \(ECI\) for children with disabilities](#)**. This approach provides essential support for families, particularly mothers, by addressing various challenges and empowering them in their caregiving roles. Designed to be easily accessible, family-centred ECI offers flexible services that prioritise emotional support for caregivers and a sense of normalcy within the home environment.

### **Why is it essential to consider mothers during ECI?**

At the earliest stages of development for children with disabilities, mothers are particularly vulnerable to psychological distress, including perinatal and postnatal depression and anxiety. Symptoms of these conditions can be effectively addressed through family-centred ECI, which offers personalised family support programmes, counselling and infant-parent psychotherapy. Strengthening the emotional bond between mother and child is crucial for their respective mental health, especially during the demanding early intervention period.

By supporting families, ECI equips mothers with the skills and resources needed to **care for their children effectively, alleviating some of the strain associated with caregiving**. Through active participation and education in their child's early development, mothers gain confidence, competence and a sense of empowerment. Specialised support programmes and tools enable them to better understand and meet their child's needs, promoting the overall well-being of the entire family.

Regular assessments and access to medical specialists ensure that mothers receive ongoing guidance and support, fostering a collaborative approach to their child's growth and development. It is essential that mothers feel equipped, valued and supported during this critical time, empowering them to fulfil their caregiving responsibilities with confidence and resilience.

Access the [full article](#).

## **Child and Family Support in Europe: Ensuring Families Receive the Best Possible Care**

MMM was delighted to co-organise, together with the [European Parents' Association \(EPA\)](#), the event **Quality Assurance in Child and Family Support in Europe: Policy Lessons for Evidence-Informed Decision Making**, which was initiated by the [European Family Support Network \(EurofamNet\)](#). The Network, which spans 35

countries with 173 participants, 144 full members, 29 associate members and 13 European organisations, presented its ongoing work in developing and implementing a quality assurance protocol for child and family support. This protocol is expected to produce an evidence-based, culturally informed model for integrated care.

The **Quality Assurance Protocol**, created through collaboration between researchers, practitioners and policy-makers, was presented by **Professors Lucía Jiménez, María Josefa Rodrigo, John Canavan and David Herrera**. It aims to improve child and family well-being, based on the principle that parents and children have the right to quality family support. Recognising that children and families are rights holders, the protocol ensures that their interests and well-being remain central to social policies, which are deeply interconnected. The protocol seeks to guarantee that families receive the best possible care, regardless of their location or the challenges they face.

**Senior policy-makers from the European level** participated in the event, reflecting on the implications of implementing and sustaining high-quality child and family support systems across Europe.

From the **European Parliament**, **MEP Maria Walsh** delivered a powerful [message](#) on the importance of the network's work.

From the **European Commission**, **Stefan Iszkowski (DG Employment)** presented the [European Child Guarantee](#) as a model of evidence-based policy-making. He explained how this initiative seeks to break the cycle of disadvantage by investing in children living in poverty and social exclusion, aiming to create a long-term positive impact. The initiative calls on **Member States to ensure access to quality early childhood education and care, education, healthcare, decent housing, and nutrition**. Additionally, the European Commission has urged Member States to produce regular progress reports to monitor the success of the Child Guarantee in combating child and family poverty.

**Chrisoula Arcoudis**, representing **DG Justice** of the European Commission, introduced the [new EU Commission Recommendation on integrated child protection systems](#). The Recommendation emphasises the need to replace siloed approaches with integrated systems, focusing on **strengthening national child protection frameworks**.

It highlights **families as primary carers** and **calls on Member States to:**

- promote an interdisciplinary approach that actively involves parents
- provide parenting and family support to prevent family separation, in the best interest of the child
- ensure the prioritisation of family-based and community care for children when alternative care is required.

The **European Parents Association (EPA)** presented EU **statistics** showing that **adults with children in the EU make every effort** to meet their families' needs, **yet often lack adequate governmental support**, leaving many to fall through the cracks. For example, among non-working adults, only 7.1% have children, compared to 17.4% without children. The association called for greater family support to assist parents in the challenging task of raising children.

As the **Policy and Practice Group lead of EurofamNet**, **MMM** emphasised that **family support** should not be limited to financial aid or access to services. It must also **empower families to nurture, protect and enable their members – children included – to thrive**. Effective family support promotes not only the well-being of children but also that of parents and the family unit as a whole. By developing such a framework, we can ensure accountability, enhance service delivery, and, most importantly, uphold the rights and well-being of families.

Watch **MEP Maria Walsh's** [video message](#).

Read the [full article](#).

## MAV: Turning the Challenges of Motherhood into Professional Opportunities

MMM is participating in the **EU funded MAV (Mom Virtual Assistant) Project**, an innovative initiative designed to empower new mothers by equipping them with high-quality training in digital, transferable and entrepreneurial skills.

Launched in November 2023, this Erasmus+ collaborative project brings together four organisations – [Leader Srl](#), [The Apartment](#), [Nantik Lum](#) and [MMM](#) – from Italy, Spain and Belgium to drive meaningful change in work-life balance and women’s employment across Europe.

**Research** conducted by organisations such as the [ILO](#), [OECD](#) and [UN Women](#) underscores the **significant challenges women face in the labour market after childbirth**. These include the gender pay gap, difficulties in achieving a sustainable work-life balance, limited access to the labour market post-maternity leave, and challenges in maintaining employment. **Yet, through motherhood, women develop invaluable soft skills** – such as time management, problem-solving, multitasking and emotional intelligence – that are increasingly relevant in today’s dynamic digital work environments. These skills merit greater recognition and validation. The **MAV Project** seeks to **address these challenges by offering high-quality training tailored to developing in-demand digital, transferable and entrepreneurial skills**. This training not only equips mothers with the tools to thrive in the labour market but also leverages the unique soft skills they gain through motherhood to empower and elevate them professionally.

The project specifically targets working-age women with children aged 0 to 6, a group whose labour force participation is disproportionately affected compared to other mothers (ILO). Furthermore, the innovative methodology underpinning the MAV training model ensures its adaptability across diverse contexts, allowing vocational training programmes to respond to the ever-evolving demands of the labour market.

### Objectives of the MAV Project:

- Equip new mothers with digital, transferable and entrepreneurial skills
- Empower new mothers to utilise the soft skills acquired through motherhood in their professional lives
- Offer training organisations a flexible and tailored model that addresses the unique needs and busy schedules of mothers.

**MMM’s role** in the Project is to **raise awareness** about the **challenges mothers face in the labour market** and to identify and promote effective practices that help eliminate barriers preventing mothers from entering or returning to the workforce.

Additionally, MMM advocates for **EU-wide recognition** of the **unique soft skills developed through motherhood as essential and valuable**. Like volunteering, motherhood fosters critical soft skills that should be acknowledged as a meaningful form of professional experience.

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

## Recent & Upcoming Events

### March

03. – 04.: ICFBE 2025: 19. International Conference on Family Business and Entrepreneurship (Bangkok, Thailand); <https://waset.org/family-business-and-entrepreneurship-conference-in-march-2025-in-bangkok>

10. – 11.: ICWMS 2025: 19. International Conference on Women, Media and Sexuality (Istanbul, Türkiye); <https://waset.org/women-media-and-sexuality-conference-in-march-2025-in-istanbul>

### April

03. – 04.: ICPF 2025: 19. International Conference on Psychology of Family (Athens, Greece); <https://waset.org/psychology-of-family-conference-in-april-2025-in-athens>

17. – 18.: ICFSC 2025: 19. International Conference on Family Studies and Community (Seville, Spain); <https://waset.org/family-studies-and-community-conference-in-april-2025-in-seville>

24. – 25.: ICGWE 2025: 19. International Conference on Girls' and Women's Education (Nicosia, Cyprus); <https://waset.org/girls-and-womens-education-conference-in-april-2025-in-nicosia>

### May

15. – 16.: ICFSS 2025: 19. International Conference on Family Studies and Sociology (Vancouver, Canada); <https://waset.org/family-studies-and-sociology-conference-in-may-2025-in-vancouver>

15. – 16.: ICCFG 2025: 19. International Conference on Contemporary Family and Gender (Vancouver, Canada); <https://waset.org/contemporary-family-and-gender-conference-in-may-2025-in-vancouver>

29. – 30.: ICMF 2025: 19. International Conference on Marriage and Family (Tokyo, Japan); <https://waset.org/marriage-and-family-conference-in-may-2025-in-tokyo>

## Impressum

### **Projects of the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family are supported by:**

- ❖ Austrian Federal Government
- ❖ Bank Austria
- ❖ Berndorf Gruppe
- ❖ 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

'Families International' is published by:

#### **Vienna NGO Committee on the Family:**

Office of the Chairperson:

VALERIA FOGLAR-DEINHARDSTEIN, M.Sc.

LIECHTENSTEINSTRASSE 111-115

1090 VIENNA

AUSTRIA

EMAIL: [CONTACT@VIENNAFAMILYCOMMITTEE.ORG](mailto:CONTACT@VIENNAFAMILYCOMMITTEE.ORG)

Web: <http://www.viennafamilycommittee.org>

Editorial Committee:

Valeria Foglar-Deinhardstein M.Sc. – Chairperson

Julia Birner B.A., Christin Kohler M.A., Karin Kuzmanov M.Sc., Hannah Prüwasser B.A. – Editors

Peter Crowley Ph.D. – Deputy Editor

Karin Kuzmanov M.Sc. – Executive Editor & Layout Current Issue No. 133

If you do not wish to be informed when a new issue of our Quarterly Bulletin 'Families International' is online and available to download, please just send an E-Mail, indicating such, to: [contact@viennafamilycommittee.org](mailto:contact@viennafamilycommittee.org)