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Preparations for and observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2014

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted in response to General Assembly resolution 66/126 and Economic and Social Council resolution 2012/10. It focuses on good practices in family policymaking in the areas of confronting family poverty and social exclusion, ensuring work-family balance and advancing social integration and intergenerational solidarity. It reviews the state of preparations for the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2014 at all levels.



I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 66/126, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit a report at its sixty-eighth session, through the Commission for Social Development and the Economic and Social Council, on the implementation of that resolution, including a description of the state of preparation for the observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family at all levels.

2. The General Assembly encouraged Member States to adopt holistic approaches to policies and programmes that addressed family poverty, social exclusion and work-family balance and that shared good practices in those areas. It also encouraged Member States to promote policies and programmes supporting intergenerational solidarity at the family and community levels. Moreover, it urged Member States to view 2014 as a target year by which concrete efforts would be made to improve family well-being through the implementation of effective national policies, strategies and programmes.

3. In its resolution 2012/10, the Economic and Social Council requested the Commission for Social Development to adopt the following themes to guide the preparations for the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family: (a) poverty eradication: confronting family poverty and social exclusion; (b) full employment and decent work: ensuring work-family balance; and (c) social integration: advancing social integration and intergenerational solidarity. The Council encouraged Member States to continue their efforts to develop appropriate policies and to share good practices in those areas.

4. The present report is the third on the status of preparations for the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family. The first (A/66/62-E/2011/4) contained a proposed framework for the preparations for the observance of the anniversary based on the three themes noted above and reviewed family-related provisions of human rights instruments. The second (A/67/61-E/2012/3) elaborated on the rationale for focusing on family poverty, work-family balance and intergenerational solidarity and, in part on the basis of national responses, reviewed the efforts made at the national, regional and international levels. The present report is based on the outcomes of international and regional expert meetings held in 2012. It builds upon the recommendations contained in previous reports and highlights good practices in family policy development in the fields chosen to guide the preparations for the twentieth anniversary. Furthermore, it describes the preparations for the observance of the anniversary at the international, regional and national levels and notes civil society initiatives in this regard.

II. Good practices in family policymaking

5. The momentous demographic, social and economic changes occurring around the world that affect families notwithstanding, the family remains the basic societal unit of reproduction, consumption, asset-building and — in many parts of the world — production. Families bear the primary responsibility for the development, education and socialization of children. They provide material and non-material care and support to their members and are the backbone of intergenerational solidarity and social cohesion. The achievement of development goals depends, to a significant extent, on how families

are empowered to fulfil their numerous functions. Accordingly, family-oriented policies have a unique role to play in helping families to fulfil their functions and benefit society at large.

6. Although there is no specific international instrument to advance a family perspective in development, Governments, largely in response to the increasing challenges faced by families, have been actively pursuing family-oriented policies at the national level.

7. There is ample evidence that family policies are most effective when targeting the family unit and its dynamic as a whole, rather than focusing on the needs of individual family members. Family-oriented policies aim mostly at strengthening a household's capacity to escape poverty and ensuring its financial independence. They increasingly focus on supporting work-family balance in order to help families to manage their functions and foster child development. More recently, policies have recognized the need to promote and support intergenerational relations and solidarity.

A. Family poverty

8. Family poverty is the inability to cover adequately the family's basic cost of living — the cost of housing, clothing, education, health care, utilities and transport — as a result of insufficient income and/or access to basic social services.

9. Chronic poverty within families is especially troubling as it is, generally, bound to continue in the next generation. Children in families living in poverty are more likely to miss out on adequate care as parents are engrossed in day-to-day life demands. Poor families, to cope with poverty, may be forced to adopt strategies jeopardizing the future development of children, such as limiting nutritious meals, postponing health-related care owing to expenses or taking children out of school so that they can contribute to the family income. Consequently, many children living in low-income households experience academic and behavioural problems and employment difficulties later in life.

10. A host of policies and programmes have attempted to confront family poverty. Family-focused social protection programmes provide additional income for families with young children to partially meet the added cost of their support. They may include birth grants, maternal and child health-care services and special dependency allowances. Social protection is widely considered a key short-term and medium-term response to family poverty. It prevents families from falling further into poverty and allows them to invest in access to education and health care for children, helping to stop the intergenerational transfer of poverty.

11. Anti-poverty, family-focused social protection programmes are in place in many developing countries. As evidence of the effectiveness of social protection strategies continues to mount, many countries, including low-income countries, have begun incorporating such programmes into their broader poverty reduction strategies. Such policies and programmes increasingly address family-related issues such as gender, child rights, marriage laws and reproductive health. In East and Southern Africa, they are also aimed at mitigating the effects of HIV/AIDS.

12. Unconditional cash transfers, mostly in the form of social pensions, are paid to vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities, orphans and older persons.

Given that most older persons in developing countries live in multigenerational households, old-age pensions often benefit the entire family by allowing older members to contribute financially to household nutrition and to supporting their children's education. For example, in Lesotho, 60 per cent of non-contributory monthly pensions received by persons more than 70 years old are redirected to children for educational and health-care expenses.

13. In sub-Saharan Africa, unconditional cash transfers target households with children. In South Africa, foster child grants are paid to foster parents caring for children under the age of 18 years. Conditional cash transfers, however, are rare in Africa, probably owing to the poor quality of educational and health-care services that make such services unreliable. Where they do exist, their beneficiaries — often selected by community-targeted exercises — are usually poor households whose members are unable to work or families caring for orphans and other vulnerable children. Although persons with moderate and severe disabilities often make up between 15 and 20 per cent of the population in developing countries, disability benefits for family members are generally absent there. A notable exception is South Africa, where a disability grant is paid to adults who are unable to work owing to mental or physical disability. National budget constraints in many African countries, however, have caused the sustainability of cash transfers to be questioned, given that these transfers have been supported mostly by external donors.

14. In Latin America, conditional cash transfers typically provide complementary income for families with young children. Families have joint responsibility for promoting the development of their children in terms of health, nutrition and education. Over the past 15 years, conditional cash transfer coverage has grown significantly and been instrumental in shaping public support for, and international consensus on, social protection. Cash transfers have been found to reduce poverty, increase school attendance (especially for girls), improve nutrition and increase rates of vaccination. In short, they have been found not only to boost family income in the short term but also to contribute to human development in the long term. Currently, 25 million households (133 million people) in 18 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean receive conditional cash transfers. Many countries have moved from conditional to unconditional cash transfers, mainly because of the high administrative costs of the former.

15. To date, the main obstacle faced by conditional cash transfers in Latin America has been the low quality of public health-care and educational services. Another challenge lies in extending the coverage to vulnerable groups such as indigenous populations, who often live in remote areas. Given that both indigenous and Afro-descendant populations often lack the birth certificates and official identification cards needed to receive benefits, efforts are under way in Brazil, Honduras, Mexico and Peru to register new beneficiaries in need of assistance.¹

16. Cash transfers in South Asia target children from poor households and often aim at increasing the school attendance of girls, delaying marriage among young girls and encouraging women to give birth in health facilities. Unconditional cash transfers typically cover older persons.

¹ Cristina Gomes, "Policy responses to recent trends in family poverty and social exclusion", paper prepared for the expert group meeting on good practices in family policymaking, held from 15 to 17 May 2012 in New York. Materials from the meeting are available from <http://social.un.org/index/Family/EGMonGoodPracticesinFamilyPolicyMaking.aspx>.

17. In Western Asia, social protection schemes generally include relief assistance to tackle poverty and deprivation, through the provision of essential social services, food aid and family allowances, and social insurance schemes to cushion the risks associated with unemployment, sickness, disability and old age. The range of family-targeted benefits varies throughout Western Asia, with more extensive access to formal social protection mechanisms offered in the States members of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

18. There is an overall emphasis on family well-being in the region as a guiding principle in the delivery of non-contributory social protection and welfare schemes, even though such support tends to be provided to targeted individuals within the household.² In Oman, for example, there are eight categories of beneficiaries of non-contributory social protection programmes, seven of which are individuals within the household, including orphans, the elderly and unemployed women. Only one is directed at the family as a whole.³ Egypt has a slightly broader definition for family-specific social protection programmes, but the standard support package for a qualifying member of the household covers only 8 per cent of all families in the country.⁴

19. In several countries of the region, non-governmental and community-based organizations, in addition to some Government entities, have supported the creation of microenterprises, small-sized enterprises and medium-sized enterprises to generate self-employment opportunities for families. These “productive families” projects focus on rural and semi-urban populations and provide families with the tools and know-how to increase their participation in activities, ranging from domestic trade, basic food processing and production of handicrafts to small-scale agribusiness. In the Sudan, such a project had lifted 2 million Sudanese out of poverty by 2002. In Yemen and other countries of the region, several programmes focus on women-specific training, capacity development and employment schemes to support family resilience.

20. Owing to persistent poverty and rising rates of family breakdown and sole parenthood, child benefits are increasingly viewed as critical to reducing poverty, ensuring basic child welfare and improving child development. Nevertheless, they remain conspicuously absent in most low-income countries. In Africa, major exceptions are the child and family allowances paid in South Africa and Mauritius, where cash transfers are focused on children and received by parents or caregivers. South Africa has implemented two main child-oriented programmes: child support grants and care dependency grants, the latter paid in the case of children with disabilities.

21. All States members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) offer some sort of child allowance for poor families in addition to specific benefits for school-age children, usually designed to encourage school attendance or meet the cost of school supplies, uniforms and meals, which represents a significant financial burden for low-income families. In the European Union, cash transfers and childcare taken together reduce poverty risks from around 17 per cent to around 8 per cent in households with children under the age of

² Economic and Social Council for Western Asia, “Social policy and social protection: challenges in the ESCWA region”, *Social Development Bulletin*, vol. 2, No. 8 (2009).

³ See www.mosd.gov.om/social_care1.asp.

⁴ See www.almasryalyoum.com/node/844476.

7 years.⁵ Child benefits are available in 30 developed countries, with 21 offering universal child benefits. Some countries have income-related child cash benefits, such as temporary assistance for needy families in the United States of America. Overall, the States members of OECD spend, on average, 2.3 per cent of their gross domestic product on family policies, two thirds of which in cash benefits and tax breaks.⁶

22. In the Russian Federation, maternal vouchers, mainly aimed at encouraging women to have more children, are provided to families when a second or any consecutive child is born or adopted. They can be used to improve housing conditions, invest in children's education or contribute to a pension fund. To date, close to 5 million women have obtained the vouchers.⁷

23. In addition to receiving cash benefits, families with children are often granted tax allowances and tax credits, such as working tax credits in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. In the United States, earned income tax credit is a refundable tax credit for low-income workers and their families. In 2008, more than 24 million families received income support through this federal programme, to a total of \$50 billion in aid. The programme lifts 2.5 million children with working parents out of poverty each year.⁸ In Australia, an increased family tax benefit is offered to families with children between the ages of 13 and 15 years, provided that they remain in school. It aims to increase family income and improve children's educational achievements.⁵

24. The OECD findings indicate that poverty risks for families in developed countries are highest in the years when parents forgo earnings to care for their young children. Once children are in school, earnings become more stable. Thus, developing and developed countries alike, to help families in the early formative years so critical for child development, need a variety of policies supporting parental employment and work-family balance.

B. Work-family balance

25. Given that gainful employment is considered the single most important factor in combating poverty, policies aiming at facilitating work-family balance have a key role in development. Moreover, since poverty rates are lower in dual-earner households, policies responding to the realities of dual-earner families are needed to reduce poverty and make it easier for both parents to combine their work and family responsibilities.⁹

⁵ Dominic Richardson and Jonathan Bradshaw, "Family-oriented anti-poverty policies in developed countries", 2012. Available from <http://social.un.org/index/Family/InternationalObservances/TwentiethAnniversaryofIYF2014/BackgroundPapers.aspx>.

⁶ See www.oecd.org/els/familiesandchildren/socialspendingdatabasesocx.htm.

⁷ Andrey Borodaevskiy, "Families under strain: realities in post-socialist Russia", paper prepared for the expert group meeting on good practices in family policymaking (see footnote 1).

⁸ Trina R. Williams Shanks and Sandra K. Danzinger, "Anti-poverty policies and programs for children and families", in *Social Policy for Children and Families: A Risk and Resilience Perspective*, 2nd ed., Jeffrey M. Jenson and Mark W. Fraser, eds. (Thousand Oaks, California, SAGE publications, 2011).

⁹ OECD stated in its 2011 publication, *Doing Better for Families*, that the poverty rate of jobless households in its member States was nearly three times higher than that of families with one earner. In two-earner households, the risk of poverty was only 4 per cent.

26. Family policies in support of employed parents typically include parental leave, early childhood care and education and flexible working arrangements. Parental leave policies and the provision of childcare and dependant care have been identified as contributing to progress in the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals relating to poverty reduction, gender equality, child mortality and maternal health.¹⁰

27. In recent years, significant progress has been made in the provision of maternity leave in Latin America, where the most extensive maternity protection — of 17 weeks or more — is offered in Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of). Maternity leave is fully paid in 18 countries, while others offer 80 per cent or less of the monthly salary. Contributory maternity benefits have also been extended in China, Jordan, Namibia and the United Republic of Tanzania. Efforts are also under way to extend maternity leave for working women in some Western Asian countries.

28. Under the terms of Council Directive 2010/18/EU of 8 March 2010, all States members of the European Union were to provide, from March 2012, at least four months of non-transferable parental leave per parent to enable men and women to take care of their children until a given age. No payment or flexibility requirements have been specified, however.¹¹

29. A growing number of high-income countries offer flexibility as to when parental leave may be taken, e.g. after maternity or paternity leave, as time off from work until the child reaches school age or on a full-time or part-time basis. Parents can also take longer periods of leave with lower benefits or shorter periods with higher benefits. Some provisions make it possible to transfer leave entitlements to carers other than parents. Currently, Slovenia has the greatest flexibility, with six options. New flexible arrangements have been introduced in Belgium, Germany and Norway. In Belgium, a statutory entitlement known as time credit, or the career break system, enables workers to break from employment for up to five years for reasons not confined to childcare provision. In addition, nearly half of the States members of the European Union have provisions for leave of 10 days or more per year to care for sick children. In several European countries, women may benefit from reduced working hours for the purpose of breastfeeding.¹¹

30. To a significant extent, the expansion of flexible leave provisions arises from the growing recognition that the direct, short-term cost of granting leave to working parents is outweighed by economic and social gains in employment retention and human capital development.¹² A number of countries have been testing measures aimed at lowering the expenses associated with paid leave entitlements, in particular in the context of small enterprises, including information and training sessions on

¹⁰ International Labour Organization, document GB.312/POL/4. Available from www.ilo.org/gb/WCMS_163642/lang--en/index.htm.

¹¹ See Fred Deven, "Leave arrangements in Europe: major trends, challenges and policy issues", paper prepared for the expert group meeting on confronting family poverty and social exclusion, ensuring work-family balance and advancing social integration and intergenerational solidarity in Europe, held from 6 to 8 June 2012 in Brussels. Available from <http://family2014.org/egmb/PD4-Deven.pdf>.

¹² Janet C. Gornick and Ariane Hegewisch, "The impact of 'family-friendly policies' on women's employment outcomes and on the costs and benefits of doing business", June 2010. Available from www.hsph.harvard.edu/centers-institutes/population-development/files/gornick-hegewisch-wb-prepubversion-2011.pdf.

leave policies, maternity planning, adopting occupational health and safety provisions for pregnant women, coaching during leave and gradual return to work through part-time work and flexible working arrangements.¹⁰

31. In addition to parental leave, affordable, good-quality childcare services are critical to the economic security of families, especially vulnerable and single-parent families. Nevertheless, although the competing priorities of work and family are at the forefront of the lives of parents, parental employment and children's development have in general been regarded as separate policy issues. Thus, public policies are concerned mostly with encouraging work among low-income families and rarely take into account the developmental needs of children.

32. Estimates indicate that more than 930 million children under the age of 14 years live in households where all adults work outside the home. Although parents, to retain their employment, need access to affordable, high-quality childcare, nearly half of the world's countries currently have no formal, early childhood care and educational programmes for children under the age of 3 years.¹³ Moreover, the quality of early childhood care and educational services remains low in most developing countries.

33. The many challenges notwithstanding, day-care programmes have been expanding in Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Costa Rica. In Chile, the *Chile Crece Contigo* (Chile Grows with You) programme provides free childcare to the most vulnerable 40 per cent of the population. Day-care programmes such as those on child development in Ecuador, community homes in Guatemala or maternal companies in Honduras allow women living in poverty to manage their work and family lives better. Similarly, a programme has been implemented in Mexico to offer day-care services to mothers who are employed or studying. In Peru, a new national programme, *Cuna Más*, financed by the Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion, assists families with the care and education of children under the age of 3 years.

34. In Brazil, *Fundo Pró-Infância* promotes the care, education and nutrition of preschool children. It is based on a partnership between national and local governments to build and provide equipment for day-care facilities, in particular in poor neighbourhoods. It combines pedagogic, administrative, recreational, sport and food components. The Mexican Social Security Institute, in collaboration with the private sector, implements a childcare programme to encourage the creation of new, small childcare facilities as small businesses owned by women.

35. A number of countries have adopted a threshold number of female employees beyond which employers are required to provide childcare facilities. Such facilities are mandatory in Libya and Tunisia in enterprises employing 50 or more women. In East Asia, childcare services have been expanding in the wake of rapid fertility declines. In the Republic of Korea, the Government has eased its construction and building operation regulations to encourage the development of childcare facilities. In addition, childcare subsidies are offered to families with children under the age of

¹³ Jody Heymann and Kristen McNeill, "Families at work: what we know about conditions globally", paper prepared for the expert group meeting on good practices in family policymaking (see footnote 1).

6 years. In Japan, the child-family support plan 2005-2009 created various types of childcare services and increased the number of children covered.¹⁴

36. Several pioneer work programmes in developing countries offer childcare services. The Productive Safety Net Programme in Ethiopia provides time off for pregnancy and breastfeeding, day-care facilities and flexible working arrangements for parents. The Labour-Intensive Rural Public Works Programme in Botswana and the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in India both offer similar provisions.

37. The States members of the European Union offer various childcare services. In France, childcare options include maternal assistants caring for one to four children in their own homes, public and company day care and nursery schools for children older than 3 years of age. Government policies support the various types of care through the use of grants and tax breaks for childcare expenses for parents, the provision of subsidies to day-care centres, payroll subsidies for nannies and reimbursement of social security contributions for maternal assistants. Interestingly, not counting children of parents on parental leave, 27 per cent of children under the age of 3 years are cared for by parents who use flexible working arrangements, such as part-time working, staggered hours and telecommuting.¹⁵ In Norway, a cash-for-care scheme allows parents with a child aged between 12 and 36 months to receive a cash benefit, provided that they do not use publicly funded early child education and care services.

38. Out-of-school-hours care programmes, such as breakfast clubs, after-school homework programmes and extended schools, have also expanded. They are especially important for children and young people in low-income families and parents in non-standard and inflexible jobs. Out-of-school-hours care services are broadly available in, among others, Australia, Estonia and Hungary and have been launched in middle-income countries such as Chile and Costa Rica.

39. Significantly, research shows the importance of stable parental care for infants and that, optimally, young children should not spend long hours without their parents in poor-quality childcare. It should also be emphasized that parents must be able to make the best choice for childcare arrangements according to their family's needs and the best interest of the child. Flexible working hours increase options and may help with making the best choices.

40. In all regions, statutory laws limit working hours in the public and private sectors. In several developing countries, informal codes of good practice have emerged. The legal right to request flexible working arrangements is rare, however. In South Africa, several codes of good practice require employers to provide an accessible, supportive and flexible environment for employees with family responsibilities. This includes considering flexible working hours and granting sufficient family responsibility leave to both parents.¹⁶ Some enterprises in Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Uruguay allow flexitime and other working arrangements for

¹⁴ Meejung Chin, "Demographic changes and work-family balance policies in East Asia", paper prepared for the expert group meeting on good practices in family policymaking (see footnote 1).

¹⁵ Marie-Laure des Brosses, "Work-family balance: good practices from France", paper prepared for the expert group meeting on good practices in family policymaking" (see footnote 1).

¹⁶ Margaret O'Brien, "Work-family balance policies", 2012. Available from <http://social.un.org/index/Family/InternationalObservances/TwentiethAnniversaryofYF2014/BackgroundPapers.aspx>.

family reasons as part of collective bargaining agreements or informal practices. Bahrain introduced flexible working hour arrangements in 13 Government ministries in 2011. In Lebanon, several private-sector companies have also made significant efforts to improve the work-life balance of their workforce as part of corporate social responsibility strategies. This sector has thus become more family friendly through the provision of support services for working mothers, incentives for telecommuting, flexible working hours and a combination of longer working days with extended weekends.¹⁷

41. A formal statutory right to request flexible working hours or part-time work for family reasons is offered in eight European countries, while informal arrangements exist in most countries, with varying ease of access. In addition, Austria, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden grant parents of young children and children with disabilities the right to work part-time. Austria, Greece, Finland, Portugal, Italy and the United Kingdom have provisions for flexible working hours and reduced hours for working parents.

42. It should be noted that, even in countries that have general leave policies and other work-family balance strategies, some categories of workers may not enjoy access to such programmes, including workers with insecure or unstable labour market histories, the self-employed, foreign migrants and those employed by private employers with fewer than 50 employees. Importantly, the work-family balance provisions described above are not available to workers in the informal labour market, a prime employer in most developing countries. Key vulnerable social and occupational groups, such as young employees without a labour contract, including many young mothers, and domestic workers, are also excluded from such provisions.

43. Some countries, however, have taken steps to protect workers in the informal economy. In Argentina, a pregnancy allowance for social protection provision offers cash benefits from the twelfth week of pregnancy until delivery to women in the informal economy who earn less than the minimum wage. In India, the Unorganized Workers' Social Security Act (2008) established minimum social security guarantees to which informal employees were entitled, including maternity benefits.

44. Although most working place and care provisions are primarily designed for working parents of young children, flexible work-care innovations are also necessary to support the growing number of employees with care responsibilities throughout the adult life course, in particular those who care for older persons or those with disabilities.

45. In the context of the current economic and financial crisis, much expenditure relating to work and family has been affected by austerity measures. In Europe, several countries have abolished birth grants and tax breaks and reduced parental leave benefits and leave duration. Means tests have sometimes been introduced to gain access to formerly universal child benefit grants, while spending on long-term care has been cut. Faced with widening deficits, most middle-income countries have

¹⁷ Dima Jamali, Asem M. Safieddine and Myriam Rabbath, "Corporate governance and corporate social responsibility synergies and interrelationships", *Corporate Governance: An International Review*, vol. 16, No. 5 (September 2008), pp. 443-459.

been compelled to introduce cuts in health and education spending, jeopardizing the well-being of increasing numbers of families.¹⁰

C. Intergenerational solidarity initiatives

46. The scope of family policies has been gradually expanding, from focusing mainly on families with young children to the inclusion of all generations. Such expansion is further warranted by rapidly ageing societies where family-oriented policies need to take into account the changing roles and demands of all generations. According to the United Nations Population Fund, the cost of caring for older dependants may negatively affect families' savings capacity, employability and productivity. Moreover, changing living arrangements have resulted in many older persons living alone or in skipped-generation households.

47. Against this backdrop, initiatives in support of strengthening the bonds between generations and promoting shared responsibility and broader goals of social integration are growing in importance. They include old-age pensions, caregiver support, promoting multigenerational living arrangements, intergenerational learning programmes and family and parental education.

48. Social pensions, aimed primarily at poverty reduction, also tend to promote intergenerational exchanges and support, as previously noted. Moreover, pensions help to raise the status of older persons within their families and are sometimes invested in income-generating activities for other family members.

49. Caregiver support programmes help adult progeny to care for ageing parents, grandparents and other older relatives who are primary caregivers of children in the same household. Grandparents raising grandchildren in the United States may also qualify for tax credits and earned income tax credits. Similarly, in Singapore, tax relief is offered to any family member who financially supports his or her grandparent or grandparents and/or great-grandparent or great-grandparents.

50. A number of housing laws have been passed aimed at promoting multigenerational living arrangements in several countries, including Canada, Japan, Qatar, Singapore and the United States. In Singapore, the Multigeneration Priority Scheme gives priority allocation for public housing to extended families, while a housing grant is paid to newly-wed couples if they buy accommodation near their parents' house. The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation encourages multigenerational living through its homeowner residential rehabilitation assistance programme, offering financial help for homeowners to create living areas for older persons who meet income and disability criteria. In the United States, the American Dream Downpayment Act includes provisions supporting housing development for grandparents raising grandchildren.

51. The multigenerational living concept is also promoted in some welfare institutions, where age-integrated facilities combine childcare services with senior-care services, such as intergenerational care centres or shared sites in the United States.

52. In Singapore, the Council for Third Age organizes intergenerational learning programmes for older persons and teenage students, where older persons are mentored by the younger generation in areas such as information and communications technology. In many countries, schools invite older residents of the

community to teach children about traditions, history, art and craft and to join in sports activities. In Ireland, a civil society organization, Generations in Action, runs art and storytelling programmes with the participation of senior citizens and primary school children, in partnership with active retirement associations, libraries, residential and day-care services, schools, resource and arts centres. The “Communities for all ages” initiative in the United States applies a multigenerational perspective to promote the well-being of all age groups and to create safe neighbourhoods, support at-risk children and families and help immigrant families. In addition, the Generations United “Seniors4Kids” programme provides volunteer opportunities to older adults in support of programmes and policies benefiting children and young people.¹⁸

53. Family and parental education are also essential for strengthening intergenerational bonds. Advanced degrees such as a master’s degree in family studies or family counselling, offered in many high-income countries, are critical to building national research and policy capacity in the area of family and in training family counsellors. A number of civil society organizations, including the International Federation for Family Development, also offer parental education courses designed to suit the various stages of child development in many countries.

54. The growing interest in intergenerational initiatives as a way of promoting social inclusion has led to the increased involvement of civil society organizations in supporting such programmes. Among them, the International Consortium for Intergenerational Programmes promotes intergenerational programmes, practice, research and public policy from a global perspective. It conducts international conferences aimed at sharing intergenerational practices and maintains a directory of intergenerational programmes (see www.icip.info).

55. To protect the rights of older persons and prevent neglect and abuse, some Governments have enacted punitive legislation obliging adult children to care for their ageing parents. In Singapore, under the Maintenance of Parents Act, elderly parents may approach a legal tribunal if their offspring do not support them financially, although the act was amended in 2010 to focus more on an approach whereby conciliation would be the first step. Similar provisions have been enacted in India under the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act (2007). The filial responsibility law in China stipulates that family members have a duty to care for their parents, while another law passed recently requires offspring to visit their parents regularly. Some countries have also adopted provisions that limit inheritance entitlements for adult children if they are unable or unwilling to support their parents.¹⁹

¹⁸ Donna Butts, “Encouraging intergenerational solidarity in the United States”, paper prepared for the expert group meeting on good practices in family policymaking (see footnote 1).

¹⁹ Donna M. Butts, Leng Leng Thang and Alan Hatton Yeo, “Policies and programmes supporting intergenerational relations” (2012). Available from <http://social.un.org/index/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=VGkxtn3WSyA%3d&tabid=1733>.

III. Preparations for, and observance of, the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2014

A. Preparations at the national and international levels

Commission for Social Development and national initiatives

56. The Commission for Social Development has reviewed the preparations for the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2014 on an annual basis. At its fiftieth session, held in New York from 1 to 10 February 2012, Member States expressed support for the continued preparations for the twentieth anniversary, noting that they served as an opportunity to revisit the challenges faced by families and improve family well-being through the implementation of effective national policies.

57. Several Member States emphasized that social protection measures were essential in safeguarding families from economic shocks and protecting them in the context of socioeconomic changes. Although the family itself was a source of informal social protection, it needed State support to perform that function effectively. Governments noted that social protection was indispensable in times of socioeconomic crises and helped by shielding families from both shocks and worsening living conditions. The International Year of Family Farming, 2014, was also seen as a way to raise support for rural families.

58. During the Commission's deliberations, several Member States shared information on their national approaches and programmes in support of families. Argentina referred to its programmes *Argentina Trabaja* (Argentina is Working) and *Familia Argentina* (Argentine Family), which targeted the most vulnerable families and communities and aimed at the social inclusion of children and older persons through the provision of cash transfers. Japan emphasized its efforts to assist parents raising children in order to boost declining fertility rates. Several countries, including Indonesia, the Republic of Korea, Senegal and South Africa, highlighted their efforts to deliver social transfer programmes and provide financial services to improve access to basic services and nutrition for families living in poverty. In Colombia, two programmes, *Familias en Acción* (Families in Action) and *Ingreso para la Prosperidad Social* (Social Income Prosperity), were aimed at strengthening education and family health and providing incentives to families to acquire income-generating capacities, respectively. A new programme in Brazil, *Bolsa Verde* (Green Grant), offered small transfers to extremely poor families to preserve national forests, extractive reserves and sustainable development areas.

Department of Economic and Social Affairs

59. The Division for Social Policy and Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs organized several meetings in preparation for the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family. An expert group meeting on the theme "Good practices in family policymaking: family policy development, monitoring and implementation: lessons learnt" was held in New York from 15 to 17 May 2012. The experts discussed current family policy trends and offered examples of good practices in family law development, work-family balance, family poverty and social exclusion reduction, in addition to describing efforts to strengthen social integration and intergenerational solidarity. They

emphasized that all Member States had a responsibility to invest in families and develop sound policies and programmes that supported families and benefited society.²⁰

60. A panel discussion on ensuring work-family balance was organized as part of events to mark the International Day of Families (15 May) at United Nations Headquarters. The panellists emphasized that recent global changes in the world of work and families themselves called for better support for working families around the world. With greater numbers of women entering the labour force and extended family members increasingly no longer available to care for young children, parents had been finding it more and more difficult to manage work and care responsibilities. In the meantime, workplace policies had not kept pace with such changes and had continued to be designed with the assumption that one parent would be able to stay at home and care for the children. Examples of good policies and practices from Europe, the United States, East Asia and Latin America were highlighted.²¹

61. The Division for Social Policy and Development launched a report entitled “Family-oriented policies for poverty reduction, work-family balance and intergenerational solidarity”, focusing on the three themes guiding the preparations for the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family.²²

B. Regional initiatives

62. A regional expert group meeting on confronting family poverty and social exclusion, ensuring work-family balance, advancing social integration and intergenerational solidarity in Europe was held in Brussels from 6 to 8 June 2012. The meeting was organized by the International Federation for Family Development, the Doha International Institute for Family Studies and Development and the Committee of the Regions, in cooperation with the Focal Point on the Family in the Division for Social Policy and Development. The participants discussed family-oriented policies in Europe, focusing in particular on those relating to child poverty, family resilience, families at risk and social protection. In considering work-family balance, they reviewed parental leave arrangements in Europe and issues of family formation and transition to parenthood. Social inclusion and the integration of older persons were discussed within the European Union framework of active ageing. Examples of good practices were offered under each topic of discussion. Experts provided recommendations for further action on family policy development in Europe.²³

63. A meeting to raise awareness of the objectives of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family was held in Brussels on 5 June 2012. Presentations were made by officials of the Committee of the Regions, the

²⁰ Materials from the expert group meeting are available from <http://social.un.org/index/Family/EGMonGoodPracticesinFamilyPolicyMaking.aspx>.

²¹ See <http://social.un.org/index/Family/InternationalObservances/InternationalDayofFamilies/2012.aspx>.

²² Available from www.un.org/esa/socdev/family/docs/WorkFamilyBalanceandIntergenerationalSolidarity.pdf.

²³ See <http://social.un.org/index/Family/InternationalObservances/TwentiethAnniversaryofIYF2014/RegionalMeetings.aspx>.

Chairperson of the Intergroup on the Family of the European Parliament and the Director responsible for Europe 2020: Social Policies at the European Commission. Members of the European Parliament, representatives of the Committee of the Regions and civil society organizations took part in the meeting.

64. The European Union promotes family policy evaluations and exchange of good practices through its European Alliance for Families, the European Demography Forum and expert groups. The European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations 2012 (<http://europa.eu/ey2012>) seeks to raise awareness of the contributions of older persons to society and to encourage policymakers to create better opportunities for active ageing and the strengthening of solidarity between generations. It aims to promote active ageing in the areas of employment, participation in society and independent living.

65. The midterm review of the Plan of Action on the Family in Africa showed mixed results. Only 10 of 25 States members of the African Union who participated in the review have adjusted their programmes and policies in line with the Plan's recommendations aimed at strengthening family units, improving their welfare and addressing their needs. Many member States, however, have developed programmes for income-generating activities and microcredit schemes to ensure the self-reliance and independence of families. Such programmes include microcredit programmes in Lesotho, loans without interest in Algeria and in-kind support in Burundi. Regional activities are planned in support of the preparations for the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family.

C. Civil society initiatives

66. As noted by the General Assembly in its resolution 66/126, civil society, including research and academic institutions, has a pivotal role in advocacy, promotion, research and policymaking in respect of family policy development and capacity-building. Many civil society organizations have actively supported the preparations for the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family and several have organized local events to raise awareness of family issues, including the Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union, the Doha International Institute for Family Studies and Development, the International Center for Work and Family, the International Federation for Family Development, the International Federation for Home Economics, the International Federation for Parent Education, Mouvement mondial des mères international, the National Council on Family Relations (United States), the New York and Vienna NGO committees on the family, the Parents Forum, the Service and Research Institute on Family and Children, the Universal Peace Federation and the Women's Board Educational Cooperation Society.

67. The Doha International Institute for Family Studies and Development organized seminars on family policy, including a briefing on the objectives of the twentieth anniversary held as a side event of the fiftieth session of the Commission for Social Development. It also sponsored the launch of a book entitled *The Family and the MDGs: Using Family Capital to Achieve the 8 Millennium Development Goals*, in which family-oriented good practices around the world were highlighted.

68. Several awareness-raising meetings were held during the period 2011-2012, with the participation of the Focal Point on the Family in the Division for Social

Policy and Development. For example, the International Federation for Family Development organized meetings and conferences on the objectives of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family and the preparations for the observance of the anniversary for policymakers, academics and opinion makers, such as that held in Madrid in October 2011. Similarly, several meetings on the reconciliation of work and family life were organized in June 2012 by the International Center for Work and Family of the IESE Business School of the University of Navarra in Barcelona.

69. The Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union launched a campaign to designate 2014 as the European Year for Reconciling Work and Family Life and held a seminar entitled “Reconciling work and care responsibilities: a challenge for family carers in Europe” during a session of the European Parliament in Brussels in June 2012. The International Federation for Home Economics launched a campaign to empower families, individuals and communities through home economics, aiming to build awareness of family-related challenges and use home economics knowledge and education to improve the quality of life of individuals, families and communities.²⁴

70. The Service and Research Institute on Family and Children, based in Chennai, India, actively supports the objectives of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family through project activities. Its projects aim at empowering families by ensuring their optimal education and health, in addition to boosting the employability skills of project participants. Its intergenerational solidarity projects focus on good parenting, childcare, enrichment and counselling courses. It uses a social and behavioural sciences approach to ensure optimal family functioning.

71. The New York and Vienna NGO committees on the family promote the objectives of the International Year of the Family and its twentieth anniversary through their seminars on family issues. The Vienna Committee is currently carrying out a study on the contributions of civil society organizations to the well-being of families, aimed at gathering and analysing data from family-oriented civil society organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

72. The approaching twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2014 serves as a reminder that the further development of family-focused policies should be an integral part of overall development efforts.

73. The benefits of socioeconomic policies focusing on families range, on the one hand, from happier families, improved child development outcomes and stronger intergenerational bonds, to having more comprehensive and cost-effective public policies, on the other. In turn, the promotion of good practices in family policies is an opportunity to arrive at sound, informed decisions about policies and programmes that are beneficial to families and cost-efficient to societies.

74. Policies aimed at poverty reduction, ensuring the work-family balance and supporting healthy intergenerational relations complement one another and

²⁴ See <http://ifhe.org/990.html>.

positively affect not only individual families and communities but also societies at large. They have proven instrumental in ensuring family well-being and have helped to strengthen the bonds that bind generations together.

75. Anti-poverty efforts, such as income-support programmes for families with children, conditional and unconditional cash transfers and child benefits, improve child and family welfare but may not be sufficient to lift families out of poverty permanently. Families, especially those most vulnerable and those headed by women, may need assistance with job training, access to education, health care and housing to escape the poverty trap. Moreover, other services helping to create a nurturing environment for children, including high-quality childcare, are needed.

76. While gainful employment provides the best defence against poverty, a lack of attention to work-family reconciliation strategies negatively affects not only the job quality, health and productivity of workers, but also their families and children. Governments, in cooperation with employers' and workers' organizations, are responsible for implementing the legislative and policy frameworks that facilitate work-family balance. Such arrangements include leave entitlements, childcare and working-time arrangements. Policies and practices in these areas make workplaces more responsive to families' needs and support child development and gender equality.

77. Social pensions, support for family caregivers, multigenerational housing arrangements and intergenerational solidarity programmes are indispensable in strengthening reciprocal ties and in helping to build a society for all ages. Shared-site projects offering services to the young and the old concurrently could serve as a service model to meet changing demographic needs. Intergenerational learning projects, which promote mutually beneficial interactions and communication between generations, are essential for social integration in families and communities.

78. Importantly, family policies should ensure a variety of opportunities and choices for families in accordance with their needs and values. Moreover, such policies should be developed in collaboration with families themselves. Given that family policies are cross-cutting and aim at empowering families, rather than assuming their functions, families, family organizations and civil society actors should cooperate in their design, monitoring and implementation.

79. International and regional exchange of good practices in family policymaking would help to ensure improvements in family policy development at the national level. Such exchange also has the potential to contribute to the development of family-oriented programmes and strategies worldwide. The establishment of regional mechanisms for exchanges, such as the European Alliance for Families, would further contribute to the achievement of this goal.

80. Commitments to families have been repeatedly expressed at the national, regional and international levels. The very objectives of the International Year of the Family and its follow-up processes, including its upcoming twentieth anniversary, should be taken up at the national level to improve the well-being of families worldwide. Analysis of good practices in family policymaking indicates that focusing on family poverty, work-family balance and intergenerational solidarity is key for Governments and other stakeholders in the context of the preparations for the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family. The

recommendations below aim at guiding national policies towards focusing on families better in order to respond to the challenges that they face.

81. Member States may wish to consider the following recommendations:²⁵

Family policy

(a) **Governments are encouraged to reduce family poverty and prevent the intergenerational transfer of poverty through adequate family-centred benefits, including social protection, old-age pensions, cash transfers, housing assistance, child benefits and tax breaks;**

(b) **Governments, in cooperation with relevant stakeholders, are encouraged to increase the provision and flexibility of parental leave, invest in early childhood care and education and improve the availability of flexible working arrangements in line with decent work and gender equality objectives;**

(c) **Governments and other stakeholders are encouraged to promote policies strengthening intergenerational solidarity through investment in family caregiver support programmes, multigenerational living arrangements, cross-generational facilities and intergenerational learning, mentoring and volunteering programmes;**

Preparations for, and observance of, the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family

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

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

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

²⁵ Further recommendations can be found in the report entitled “Family-oriented policies for poverty reduction, work-family balance and intergenerational solidarity” (see footnote 22).