

Summary of Proceedings

A. Background and objectives

The United Nations Programme on the Family in the Division for Social Policy and Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) organized, in collaboration with the Doha International Institute for Family Studies and Development, an Expert Group Meeting on the interrelationship between family policy and the promotion of social protection and intergenerational solidarity, held 14-16 April in Doha, Qatar.

The theme of the Meeting was “Family policy in a changing world: promoting social protection and intergenerational solidarity”. Experts dealing with various aspects of social development were invited from a broad geographical distribution to participate in the meeting in their personal capacities. Experts were asked to present a paper, participate in group discussions and give their expert opinion and policy recommendations on strengthening family policymaking and integrating a family perspective into the implementation of social protection policies and in the fostering of intergenerational solidarity.

Supporting families, providing social protection and furthering social integration through the strengthening of intergenerational solidarity are all important facets and objectives of social policy and social development. The family, as the basic unit of society, is inextricably linked to the concepts of social protection and intergenerational solidarity. However, while family is often mentioned in the context of social protection and intergenerational solidarity, there is also a need to examine more closely the direct links between these two concepts with family and family-related policies.

The primary objective of the Expert Group Meeting was to consider the concept of family policy, analyze how family and family policy are inter-related to social protection and intergenerational issues, and provide policy recommendations to use public policy and, in particular, family policy to support family well-being through strengthened social protection and intergenerational solidarity.

Social protection plays a crucial role in social development. In its 39th session in February 2001, the United Nations Commission for Social Development addressed the priority theme “Enhancing social protection and reducing vulnerability in a globalizing world”. An additional objective of the expert group meeting was to therefore build upon the accumulated knowledge of social protection in order to examine social protection specifically in the context of family policy and integrating a family perspective into social protection systems and policymaking.

The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA), adopted at the United Nations

Second World Assembly on Ageing (2002), states that solidarity between generations at all levels – in families, communities and nations – is fundamental for the achievement of a society for all ages. Despite geographic mobility and other pressures of contemporary life that can keep people apart, the great majority of people in all cultures maintain close relations with their families throughout their lives. These relationships work in both directions, with older persons often providing significant contributions both financially as well as the education and care of grandchildren and other kin. The MIPAA therefore contains an explicit objective to strengthen solidarity through equity and reciprocity between generations. A further objective of the expert group meeting was therefore to examine intergenerational solidarity from a family policy perspective in the context of the many changes affecting families.

B. Family policy and integrating a family perspective into policy making

Experts noted that family policy scholars have not come to a general consensus on how to define family policy. Some definitions are very broad and flexible, such as “everything that government does to and for the family”. Many definitions address family policy actions only taken by governmental bodies, such as “government activities that are designed to support families and enhance family members’ well-being.” Historically, the target of family policy has often been restricted to families with children, excluding families providing care and economic support to adults, and the content of family policy has often been confined to economic issues, overlooking several other important aspects of family functioning.

In order to avoid the possibility of spending much time coming to a consensus on a definition, the experts decided not to attempt to designate or determine a particular definition. However, one approach to discussing family policy and to increasing awareness of the policies that affect families is to make the distinction between explicit and implicit policies.

Explicit family policies include those policies and programs deliberately designed to achieve specific objectives regarding the family unit, individuals in their family roles or children. They may include population policies (pro- or anti-natalist), income security policies designed to combat poverty and assure families with children a certain standard of living, employment-related benefits for working parents, maternal and child health policies, child care policies, maternity and paternity leave, domestic violence and family planning. In this context, family policy may assume a diversity and multiplicity of policies rather than a single monolithic, comprehensive legislative act.

Explicit family policies may cover such major family functions as¹:

- a) family creation (e.g., to marry or divorce, bear or adopt children, provide foster care);
- b) economic support (e.g., to provide for family members’ basic needs);
- c) childrearing (e.g., to socialize the next generation), and

¹ Bogenschneider, 2006.

- d) family care giving (e.g., to provide assistance for the family members who are ill, frail, with disabilities, or older and in need of assistance or care).

Implicit family policies are those policies not specifically or primarily intended to affect families yet have indirect consequences on them. They include actions taken in other policy domains, for non-family related reasons, which have important consequences for children and their families as well. For example, policies regarding immigration or HIV/AIDS may have major consequences for children and their families, yet do not directly target them.

For these policies that fall outside of explicit family policies, there is the term “a family perspective in policymaking”. This perspective analyzes the consequences of any policy or programme, regardless of whether it is explicitly aimed at families, for its impact on family well-being, including family stability, family relationships and a family’s ability to carry out its responsibilities. It assumes that sensitivity to effects and consequences for families informs the public debate about all policies, particularly, but not limited to, social policies. It is concerned with monitoring a broad range of actions in terms of their potential or actual impact on children and their families.

A country’s several social policy initiatives may affect different aspects of family functioning, but may be designed to achieve different and sometimes even contradictory objectives. It is important to examine these policies from a family perspective in order to be fully aware of the affects on family functioning and to improve policy consistency and coherence. This approach can also be helpful in identifying and correcting unintended negative consequences of social or other policies on families. Analyzing policies from a family perspective is therefore particularly important in those countries that do not have explicit family policies.

A holistic approach, institutional mechanisms and measuring the effects and effectiveness of family policy initiatives

Whether countries have explicit or implicit family policies, or both, experts stated that what is more important for policy effectiveness is that the policies be deliberate. That is, the policies in place reflect a deliberate political decision determining the desired policy. Other elements of policy effectiveness include clarity and consistency, so that the elements of the policy and its objectives are fully understood and non-contradictory.

In addition, a holistic approach is also important for clarity and effectiveness, as often a country’s family policy may be made up of a series of fragmented policies that result in significant gaps where particular issues may not be addressed. Since there are many different initiatives that fall under the umbrella of family policy, it is important to have an understanding of the word “policy”

that assumes a diversity and multiplicity of policies rather than a single, monolithic, comprehensive legislative act.

One very important element of an effective family policy includes addressing and promoting child well-being, including education, healthcare, quality childhood care and the promotion of responsible parenting. Another is respecting gender equality, including being fully aware and mindful of the different potential effects of policies on men and women and how this affects the status of women in the family and in society. In both cases, this also includes fully implementing policies for the early detection, reporting, and intervention in cases of abuse, including child abuse, gender-based violence and all forms of domestic violence and abuse, providing appropriate services and law enforcement protection for the victims and setting appropriate consequences for the perpetrators, while also providing them with behavioural-change services and counseling.

Family policy instruments include laws, cash and tax benefits; services; and administrative directives. Some of the major instruments are:

- The laws of inheritance, adoption, guardianship, child protection, foster care, marriage, separation, divorce, custody, and child support;
- Income transfers, including child and family allowances, social insurance, social assistance, and tax policies, among others;
- Policies assuring time for parenting, including paid and job protected leaves from employment following childbirth or adoption, and during children's illnesses or school transitions;
- Early childhood care and education policies, both services and various forms of cash and tax subsidies to extend access to such services;
- Family planning;
- Social service programmes;
- Housing policies; and
- Maternal, child and family health services.

In order for a family policy and the policy instruments to be effective, a country must have an institutional mechanism responsible for overseeing, implementing and monitoring the policy and measuring its results. Measuring impact and effectiveness is often hampered by data gaps, such as absence of systematic data on child well-being, including data on major family and child problems and best practices in policy responses.

Reconciling work and family and the quest for shared responsibility

The issue of reconciling work and the family is high on the policy agendas of many countries, where a general social consensus has emerged concerning the need to implement ways of helping

families, and especially women, to cope with employment obligations and the time-consuming tasks of caring for the younger and older generations.

The competing tasks of female labor force participation and child care

There are strong reasons for the growing demand for reconciliation policies, and the current demographic and social trends indicate that this will continue. The most predominant reason is the increase in female participation in the labour market. The family, once based on a model of the male breadwinner, is now increasingly dominated by a family model with two working parents. There has also been a rise of other family forms, including lone parent families, due to divorce or not marrying, where the lone parent is working in the labor force.

The emerging modern family model differs significantly from the old one, bringing new benefits for people but demanding important social adaptations. Many societies were organized, and still are in many ways, around a form of family based on highly differentiated gender roles. The male was the breadwinner, focusing on his role in the work place, thanks to a wife at home taking care of the children and any older family members. No social provisions were necessary for very young children, whose care fell on the mother at home, nor for the elderly. Even today, time schedules, such as school hours, continue to be based on the expected availability at all hours of the housewife.

Reconciling work and the family is therefore not only a matter of providing assistance to women or families, but can also be viewed as a central issue for society to adapt to the new opportunities for women and the new family model of mothers participating in the labor force.

Another reason for interest in reconciliation policies is concern in many countries about low fertility, which could be directly related to difficulties in reconciling work and the family. In an increasing number of developed countries, the traditional inverse relationship between the labor force participation rate of women and fertility has become positive; that is, countries with higher fertility rates are those with the highest female participation rates. This reflects the fact that in countries with sufficient facilities for combining working and child caring, women are able to both stay in the labour market and have children.

Working in the labor market and caring for children are competing tasks, especially – but not only – when small children are involved, because working mothers with children of school age are confronted with specific and compelling problems which are less well perceived than those related to the care of very young children.

For the increasing number of families where there is a working mother, coping with two

competing activities means drawing from existing resources, mainly of three types: a) facilities provided by employers; b) public policies; and c) family and personal strategies. In many countries, the role of employers is fairly limited or non-existent. It can also be noted that an absence of either employer facilities or public policies puts the burden on the family network, particularly on the working mother herself. When the strain between family and work increases, the consequences can be direct for both employers, via reduced productivity or women giving up employment, and for family and society, via women delaying or foregoing childbearing.

Reconciling work and the family therefore consists of solving a number of specific issues of non-compatibility that working parents have to deal with. Therefore, a basic condition for an effective policy is to implement measures that address real, practical problems that are the most urgent and difficult to solve by the parents themselves. It is thus necessary to analyze situations where families with two working parents, or lone parent families, are less able to face without external help. These include at least four situations where labor market employment and child care are particularly difficult: the care of children below age three; the care of children of all ages when ill; coordinating work and school time schedules; and dealing with holidays, particularly school holidays, which are typically more frequent and for longer periods of time than work holidays.

Policy instruments and criteria for choice

There are three main policy instruments for a direct policy aiming at reconciling work and the family: parental leave, child care services and cash allowances to cover child care expenses.

There are at least five types of parental leave, including maternity leave, parental child care leave, paternity leave, reduction of time worked and leave for urgent family matters. Maternity leave varies by country according to length of time and percentage of salary received. Parental child care leave is intended for the care of small children at home by the mother or the father. Of those countries that have this leave, the most significant difference is whether the leave is paid or not. However, two common features are the right to return to the job after the period of leave and the explicit provision that the leave may be taken by either the mother or the father. Despite this explicit possibility, aimed at reinforcing gender equity, the fact is that this leave is taken by an overwhelming majority of women. Paternity leave directed to fathers only has arisen at least partly from the fact that allowing both parents to benefit from parental leave does mean that fathers will be more actively engaged in childcare. Reduction of time worked and leave for urgent family matters are less common and vary significantly by country.

Child care services for children of pre-school age may alternatively be considered as a need for parents both engaged in the labor market or as a right of children to adequate care. Enrolment rates of children under six varies considerably for early education services, aimed at children 3-5

years, and for childcare services for children aged 0-2 years.² Early education (ages 3-5) tends to be included in the general school system, with the focus on education rather than care. Some countries show high or very high enrolment rates in early education services and a very small one in childcare services. In general, care of small children (under three) relies heavily on the family, which is why working mothers perceive their care as one of the most difficult situations they have to face. Pre-school services may be public-funded or private and, if public, they may be directly run by a public administration or by private bodies. The public-private mix varies also considerably among countries.

Cash allowances for children have played a growing role as a way of supporting reconciliation of work and the family since the 1990's and have given rise to an important social and political debate about their use and effectiveness. The rationale for this type of public action is twofold. First, it allows parents to freely choose the care modality given to their children and, second, it can be taken as a form of housewife remuneration and is therefore perceived by many as a preference for child care by the mother. Cash allowances may also be seen as a way of supporting the offering of private childcare services with public funds. Another controversial issue is that cash allowances do not guarantee that the effective use of the money received will benefit the child.

Different policy instruments that help in the reconciliation of work and family can have very different effects on certain aspects of social life. Therefore, available policy measures need to be evaluated not only in relation to their suitability and efficiency, but also in relation to their effects on child welfare, social equality and gender equity. The criteria of child welfare gives priority to policy instruments that guarantee and allow for verification that children are adequately cared for and that available resources are actually devoted to children. Measures aimed at reconciliation may have a positive impact on social equality, but they could also have a negative impact if the policy is based on instruments not accessible to all or if there is a social bias in the access. Special care should be taken with the effects of reconciliation measures on gender equity. Policy measures should be expected to increase gender equity inside the family and at the work place. Those instruments that may slow down or even reverse existing trends of reduction of labor exclusion or discrimination in the case of women or family involvement, in the case of men, should be considered less adequate than others increasing gender equity.

Special issues regarding family policymaking in developing countries

When discussing family and family policies in developing countries, care must be taken to recognize that the different societal contexts can be quite different, both between and within countries. It is therefore quite important to not over generalize. At the same time, there are also some similarities between several developing countries in the challenges they face when engaging in family policymaking.

² The OECD average is 74% for early education and 22,6% for childcare. Cite Cordon paper again here.

Cultural diversity and customs

In many developing countries, the formulation of a comprehensive single national family policy, while not impossible, can be a very difficult task because of the large and complex array of heterogeneity within society. Many developing country societies exhibit considerable variations between regions, rural and urban areas, social classes, and different religious and ethnic groups. One country may contain a collection of micro-regions and sub-cultures with very distinct differences. These differences may also be discernible with respect to the level of female literacy, sex ratio, age at marriage of girls, incidence of dissolution of marriage, household size, female workforce participation rate, marital practices, gender relations and authority structure within the family. Diversities inherent in the society may also be reflected by a plurality of family types.

Barriers to the creation of a comprehensive national policy in an area as personal as family may be intricate and may have formed over several hundreds of years. In particular, minority groups may be suspicious of attempts to form a national policy, as they may see it as an attempt to force them to abandon long-held traditions in order to adopt the practices of the majority. What may be interpreted as an increase in state intervention in the family may be unpalatable to many and, if there is a strong counter-reaction, could also be counterproductive.

Many family traditions and customs are quite positive and result in strong and supportive families. At the same time, in many countries there may also be harmful family customs or traditions that have been explicitly addressed in a family policy through the passage of legislation or laws and yet, because of strong tradition, are still practiced. In developing countries, the laws may not be known in remote areas of the country, or are not enforced because of a lack of political will at the local level or because the practice is so prevalent that enforcing them would overwhelm the judicial system, which may already be weak. In the case of customs or practices that are harmful to family members and a violation of their human rights, such as domestic violence, child marriage, child labor or child abandonment, the first challenge is to address the harmful custom through an explicit family policy or law. However, the second challenge is to have the policy or law implemented and enforced, particularly in remote areas far away from the capital.

Despite any difficulties, it is necessary that all countries develop family policies to improve the implementation and enforcement of laws prohibiting harmful traditional practices towards women, children, older persons, family members with disabilities or other family members. In those countries where child marriage is practiced, it is imperative to take adequate measures to eradicate the practice through improving the implementation and enforcement of relevant laws and establishing a minimum age for marriage. It is also necessary to implement policies to prevent child labour and child abandonment, including providing for family welfare and, in the case of abandonment, provide education to families to reduce child abandonment as well as develop and

improve the foster care system.

Resources, education and capacity-building

In many developing countries, there are low levels of financial resources for formulating and implementing family policies, which may also not be given the same priority or sense of urgency as other policies, such as poverty eradication efforts or economic development.

Education in family issues and particularly in family policy is very limited in most developing countries. While social work departments may exist at universities, programmes focused on families, such as family studies, family psychology, or family counseling, are usually not present, resulting in a shortage of local family scholars and practitioners.

In order to build capacity in this area, family life education could be introduced at different instructional levels, such as universities, secondary schools, community centers and hospitals, in order to have qualified personnel providing family social services. These services would have a focus on family relations, marriage, and parenting. Premarital and marital counseling and support groups for specific issues, such as immigration and disability, could be provided as prevention and intervention mechanisms to promote marital and parenting quality, effective conflict resolution skills and financial management knowledge.

In the area of family policy, the international community could also increase efforts to assist in capacity building training of government officials. Access to a university level course in family policy would also be an important capacity-building measure.

Families and transnational migration

Transnational migration is a major contemporary issue in many developing countries. In some countries, due to economic migration, significant numbers of children live without one or both parents, who are working abroad. Many migration concerns and policies focus on the economic aspects and legal protection issues with the receiving countries, and there is usually not much attention paid to the psychosocial impact that migration has on families and the support they need to adapt to this phenomenon. As such, policies need to be developed to support migrant families and children, through programmes that provide information on migration to assist families to cope with the challenges of migration, as well as individual and group support for children, parents, grandparents and other family caregivers.

C. Integrating a family perspective into social protection

Article 16.3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.” Social protection is therefore linked to family and the protection that society and the State provide to it.

Social protection

Social protection plays a crucial role in social development. It may be seen as an explicit approach to attenuate, reduce, mitigate or cope with vulnerability and risk of individuals and, by implication, families. It can be broadly understood as a set of public and private policies and programmes undertaken by societies in response to various contingencies to offset the absence of, or substantial reduction of income from, work; provide assistance for families with children; and provide people with health care, housing and other social services.

Social protection may be seen in the context of two main subcategories: social assistance, which encompasses public actions that are designed to transfer resources to groups deemed eligible due to deprivation; and social insurance, financed by contributions and based upon the insurance principle, where individuals, families or households protect themselves against risk by pooling resources with a larger number of similarly exposed people.

In general, social protection embodies a society’s responses to levels of either risk or deprivation that are deemed unacceptable. Therefore, underpinning a social protection system is a social consensus, either implicit or explicit, and based on values of civility, fraternity and social solidarity, concerning what are acceptable levels of risk and deprivation, and ensuring access to livelihood, employment and income; health and education services; nutrition; and shelter. Social protection deals with both the absolute deprivation and vulnerabilities of those living in poverty, as well as the need for security in the face of shocks and lifecycle events, such as ageing, of those not living in poverty.

The ultimate purpose of social protection is to increase capabilities and opportunities and thereby promote human development. In general, social protection should be seen not only as a residual policy of assuring the welfare of the poorest, but also as a foundation at a societal level of promoting social justice and cohesion, developing human capabilities and promoting economic dynamism and creativity.

Social protection and family policy

Social protection policies and systems and family policies are highly interrelated. Traditionally,

kinship and the family served as the basic system of social protection. Today, while in developed countries the state has assumed much of the responsibility for social protection, the family continues to provide many social protection functions, such as care-giving to older family members.

In the context of family policy, there are direct family policy aspects, where social protection policies are designed specifically either for families, such as assistance to families with children, or in direct relation to family, such as policies to protect children from family-based child abuse. There are also other social protection policies, such as unemployment benefits and pension systems, that are not specifically designed for families in the context of family policymaking, but that nonetheless directly affect families. In the interest of family well-being, it is beneficial to analyze these policies from a family perspective.

One of the principal aims of social protection is to provide at least minimum standards of well-being to people in dire circumstances, enabling them to live with dignity. Since most people continue to live in the context of a family with other family members, the relationship between this aspect of social protection and family policy is quite direct.

In the context of developing countries, a large majority of the population is engaged in various forms of rural or urban self-employment, and is therefore outside any formal system of social protection. Extending formal and public social protection to these groups in a meaningful way is a very large challenge. In such contexts, the majority of effective support that individuals receive comes not from public sources but from the family and institutions of kinship, and from community and civil society, especially religious organizations. There may also be a sense of skepticism concerning the will or capacity of public policy to deliver to those living in the worst conditions of poverty.

In recent years, social protection has seen a surge of interest by developing countries and among donor agencies. This has in part been a result of the experiences in Latin America around conditional cash transfers, which are often family based, and the experience of many African countries in intergenerational care – again, usually family based – in the context of HIV/AIDS.

In general, broad-based social protection policies need to be adopted and implemented to mitigate and counteract all the sources of vulnerability such as chronic crop failures, health epidemics, environmental disasters and other external shock. The process of formulating and implementing social protection systems and long-term development plans should fully consider family, and social protection policies should be aligned with family policy in all areas and aspects, including health, education, housing and food security.

Children, families and social protection

Children, globally, are the most vulnerable group in society. They comprise the largest proportion of the population in all developing countries, with the youngest populations often in the poorest countries. Across the globe, children are over-represented among the poor, and the impacts of poverty and social exclusion are compounded for children from marginalized communities or for those with disabilities or facing gender discrimination. They do not generally have voice when they are very young, and are not necessarily heard when they do have a voice. They are primarily reliant on their parents and family.

In developed countries, systemic provisions are in place to protect child rights and to support family functioning. In many developing countries, oversight bodies do not exist, and services and social transfers to support family functioning are often fragmented. Child rights are fundamental, and moreover, a neglect of children's rights to nutrition, health, education and care can have effects that are not reversible. A case is therefore made that children be prioritized in any social to protection programmes. Child-sensitive social protection could follow a set of principles (UNICEF 2008), such as:

- Recognizing that families raising children need support to ensure equal opportunity for children and to ease the childcare-work dichotomy for parents and caregivers;
- Making special provision to reach children who are most vulnerable and excluded, including children without parental care, as well as children who are marginalized within their families or communities due to their gender, disability, ethnicity or other factors;
- Intervening as early as possible where children are at risk, in order to prevent irreversible impairment or harm to children;
- Addressing the age and gender specific risks and vulnerabilities of children.

Ultimately, child-sensitive social protection would mitigate the effects of poverty on families, strengthen families in their childcare roles, and enhance access to basic services for the poorest and marginalized, as well as be responsive to children who are at risk by virtue of living outside a family environment, as well as to those who suffer from abuse and discrimination at home.

Gender, families and social protection policies

Women play a central role in the family. They contribute to all the functions of the family, including, but not limited to, family creation, economic support, childrearing and family care-giving. They keep their families together, undertake care work for those who are sick, play a key role in securing food and are in general the backbone of socio-economic activities. The presence of a mother within the family is so important for family stability that it should be recognized and

supported in every way. Given the centrality of the role of women in families, it is important that family policies and social protection recognize this and seek to strengthen their role.

However, women may be caught in the paradoxical situation that while they have worked hard to care for and protect their families all their lives, the patriarchal nature of many societies does not give them equal treatment in social protection when they need help from either informal institutions or formal systems. There are many gender inequality challenges that they face, including local customs and legal institutions that discriminate against women owning and controlling land and resources; accessing employment, education and public services; and the affects of domestic violence.

While all areas of gender inequality affect families in some way, of particular concern to family policy is gender-based violence. Despite the many efforts that have been employed to combat gender-based violence, negative customary norms persist in contradiction to the provisions of basic human rights and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

One large challenge is attitudinal change on the part of families and communities that hold on to cultural practices that form violence to girls and women, such as early marriage or wife beating. Governments have a major responsibility to spearhead attitudinal change towards culture and traditions that foster subordination of women by men, gender discrimination and practices that are harmful to the health and welfare of women and girls. Public awareness campaigns on the value of girl children, through public education, promoting equal treatment of girls and boys, is critical. Respect for girls and women must be instilled in boys from early age. Male responsibilities in the family life must be included in the education of children from the earliest age with special emphasis on the prevention of violence against women and children. Sensitization and awareness creation should be done especially through community leaders, such as traditional and religious leaders.

Socially excluded families and families affected by displacement and migration

Social exclusion on the basis of gender, ethnicity, caste, language, religion, location, ability or other factors deprives individuals and communities of political voice and representation, of equitable access to social services and of access to assets and predictable livelihoods and decent work. Across the globe, groups who are economically and socially excluded live with gaps in health, education, access to essential social services and adequate shelter, and generally see their rights unfulfilled.

Social protection interventions can be used as measures for compensation and affirmative action, and provisions need to be factored into universal social protection to focus transfers – and

services – on vulnerable groups and areas. One idea is to introduce universal categorical transfers, such as a child benefit or a pension, to vary the benefit by degree of deprivation in the region concerned, and to couple it with massive campaigns for information.

Humanitarian crises and natural disasters are increasing, and conflicts becoming more protracted, globally, and notably in developing countries. Internal and cross-border displaced and refugee groups number 67 million -- 26 million are conflict-driven internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 25 million are natural disaster-driven IDPs (UNHCR 2007)).

Moreover, migration in search of work, much of it distress driven, is becoming a way of life, with an estimated 200 million official trans-boundary migrants recorded globally (IOM 2009) If intra-country and informal sector migrants were recognised, the number would be even much larger. Displacement and migration are the most visible area in terms of impact on families – whether there is a single migrant from a household, or the family migrates, social and psychological impact is part of the experience – and can often be based upon distress.

Migrants from developing countries are generally not eligible for social protection and other family services in the host country, and usually do not earn health insurance or old age pension entitlements, leaving them especially vulnerable. Given the scope and the scale of the issue, social protection for these groups of people – and their families – is an urgent policy issue. It also illustrates the interaction between lack of decent work opportunities and social protection in home countries, which can drive low-income migration, and the gap in international provisions for migrants. Policies and support need to be developed for families in fragile situations, such as refugees, migrant families, internally displaced persons/families.

D. Intergenerational solidarity within families and communities

Intergenerational social cohesion among family members

The simplest definition of intergenerational solidarity used by scholars in the field is “social cohesion between generations”. The family is a natural and essential social structure where this cohesion is created and reinforced. Sociologists have long recognized that forms of social organization affect well-being. The family constitutes the most basic social institution, representing the first group into which one enters at birth, and these ties remain primary over the life course. Indeed, the first intergenerational relationship is that between parents and children.

Scholars of intergenerational solidarity also often consider that the interdependence among generations during the life cycle can be analyzed at two levels:

- a) Macro generational cohesion among age groups (cohorts) who identify with specific events

or national and global situations; and

- b) Micro generational cohesion among grandparents, parents and grandchildren within families. Relationships among these generations include those among members of nuclear and extended families, such as aunts, uncles, cousins and siblings.

During the last several decades there have been at least two significant social changes taking place that affect intergenerational relations, involving family and ageing.

Family is an obvious area of large demographic and societal change. Some of the major changes that families around the world face include plummeting birth rates, increased divorce rates, increased labor force participation of women, increased birth rates of unmarried women, increased numbers of older persons living independently rather than mainly living with their children and increased numbers of migrant families and families affected by migration. Another change is in family structures from “pyramids”, with a large number of children and young people relative to a smaller number of older persons, to “beanpoles”, with much less children and young people but an increased availability of extended, intergenerational family and kin.

Changes in patterns of family formation and dissolution and the diversification of households lead to more complex and “atypical” family and household structures. The diversity of family formats creates uncertainty in intergenerational relations and expectations and has specific effects on life-course role transitions, such as grandparenthood and retirement. The structural organization of the family is particularly critical for those in middle age, a phase in life when individuals are likely to play multiple roles of parent, worker, breadwinner and caregiver to older parents.

Increased life expectancies imply that some individuals will be members of a three or even four generation family for longer periods of time, while declining fertility rates and delayed parenthood suggest that others will never be members of such multigenerational families.

Another area of change related to increased life expectancy is the unprecedented growth in the number and proportion of older persons in most countries around the world, a trend which is expected to continue. The proportion of people age 60 and over is increasing faster than any other age group. Within this group, a group of “oldest old” is also growing.

The global phenomenon of ageing societies raises several questions and issues about the micro experiences of older people and their families, and the micro responses of families and the macro responses of societies to the needs of these ageing populations. Population ageing is not in itself a problem, but it does mean a changing balance between older and younger people in society and the challenge of establishing new generational relations of mutual support, social inclusion and social integration.

The increase in life expectancy of older persons also means that a growing number of them who become frail will need more care and support. Care giving by adult children to their older parents is a major social issue because families in modern societies are still the main source of care and support for older people. However, the inability or unwillingness of societies to continue to meet the needs of older cohorts alters the balance between family and societal systems in terms of responsibility for the care of older persons. Such a situation creates socio-political and policy challenges to social integration and social cohesion. In light of these changes in family and changing demographic structures, intergenerational bonds among family members may be even more important today than previously, because individuals live longer and thus can share more years and experiences with older generations.

There is a need to further explore how intergenerational solidarity could be strengthened through public action. One major question related to family policy, social protection and intergenerational solidarity is what will be the role of society, through its system of social protection and social services provision, in enhancing family relations and solidarity between generations at the family level. Other related questions include the policy implications of the potential for intergenerational family conflict; the impact of generational family ties on the well-being of older persons; the amount of help and support that is actually exchanged between family generations; and the strength of the bonds of expectations and obligations between generations.

Multigenerational living arrangements and intergenerational financial transfers

One way to observe the dynamics of intergenerational family relationships and how they have been changing over time is to look at trends in multigenerational living arrangements and intergenerational financial transfers. As distinct from western developed countries, multigenerational households, where older persons live in three-generation households, as well as the proportion of persons aged 65 and over co-residing with their adult children, are still fairly common in many parts of the world, particularly in east Asia. However, the general trend is that the prevalence of these living arrangements has been declining over the past several decades.

In parallel with these changes in multigenerational living arrangements, the magnitude of the intergenerational financial support from adult children to their elderly parents has also declined. In many countries, particularly those that have been developing quickly, the income sources of older persons have changed considerably, and the proportion receiving financial support from children has subsequently decreased. The proportion of older persons receiving public pension benefits has increased over time, and there is also a significant proportion that is able to rely on their own savings. These inter-temporal changes in the sources of income for older persons are closely connected with the improvement of old-age pension benefits and considerable economic growth during the past few decades.

These demographic and socioeconomic transformations have been affecting, over time, the pattern and mode of intergenerational transfers, including net private transfers, net public transfers and net reallocations through assets. The composition of per capita net transfers to the older population has been changing, with the amount of per capita net public transfers to the older population increasing and the amount of per capita net asset-based reallocations growing. In contrast, the relative importance of per capita net familial transfers from the young to the older has been declining. These results seem to indicate that older persons have been increasingly dependent upon public transfers, predominantly in the form of old-age pensions and medical care services, and asset-based reallocations in supporting their retirement life.

Of particular interest is that in times of economic hardship, the relatively young older persons (roughly in their 60s and early 70s) provided financial assistance to their adult children and/or grandchildren. This result appears to suggest that familial transfers are more flexible and responsive than public transfers in coping with large-scale economic shocks. It also shows that the level of intergenerational solidarity of retired parents to their adult children is quite strong.

Although family organization has been changing very rapidly over the past several decades, older persons still play a significant role in supporting their offspring when the latter encounter economic hardships. Despite the fact that multigenerational co residence has been deteriorating over the past few decades, older persons who have been increasingly dependent upon their steadily-increasing public pension benefits have been playing a vital role in providing financial support – and intergenerational solidarity – for their adult offspring when the latter encounter economic difficulties. Although older persons are often considered liabilities for the country, they are actually playing a key role as a social safety net. For this reason, they should be considered assets.

Active ageing in the family and community

At the United Nations Second World Assembly on Ageing held in Madrid in 2002, there was an emphasis on developing national plans of action that focused on older people and development, advancing health and well-being in old age, and providing an enabling and supportive environment.

This paradigm was further reinforced with the promotion of active ageing, which consists of three pillars: older persons' health, participation and security. The overall premise is that active ageing will enable older persons to participate in the community, provided that they are given support from members of the community, including the younger generations.

Active ageing is part of a paradigm that looks to increase the quality of life not only during the later years of life, but throughout an individual's lifetime. In this sense, the roots of active ageing are actually at the beginning of childhood, looking to improve health and quality of life

throughout a person's life, leading to a high quality of life during the later years and having a death with dignity. Therefore, the dissemination of active ageing principles of healthy lifestyles, the promotion of active ageing that includes intergenerational solidarity to prevent social exclusion of older persons and people with special needs and the promotion of security for older persons should begin as early as possible in an individual's life, both informally in the family and formally at school, as early as primary school.

The links between active ageing and intergenerational solidarity are not restricted to the prevention of social exclusion of older persons. As active ageing increases the quality of life of an older person, the quality of life of that person's family members may benefit, as well. As older persons remain actively involved in work, community and family life, they will experience a higher quality of life in their later years, be able to contribute to the activities and needs of younger generations in both their families and communities, and be less dependent on younger family members. To the extent that active ageing assists older persons to have improved health and well-being, their needs for care and support from younger family members will be reduced and their ability to continue to contribute to family life will be enhanced.

For older persons to remain active as long as possible, establishing opportunities in the workplace, general community, including through volunteerism, and family has great potential for intergenerational activities, such as having older workers serving as mentors to their younger co-workers in the workplace. However, the focus is not necessarily to extend the working life of older persons, but to provide them with choices and opportunities for participation and interaction, including the opportunity to start another career in a field of interest or to continue work at a reduced level of hours. For many older persons, interaction with others serves as a strong incentive for to be active.

The establishment of centers of active ageing where young and old people can meet, interact and work together is very important to promote older person quality of life and intergenerational activities, relations and solidarity, as well as to help prevent social exclusion in the community. In this case, age-friendly initiatives by cities and communities, including agro-centers in rural communities, should be promoted. The establishment of active ageing centers in the community, especially those with a large proportion and number of older persons, could be planned and funded by the community and facilitated by older persons alliances' between government and civil society elements in the community concerned with older person affairs.

In refinement of future national plans of action on ageing in countries facing or contemplating an aged society, the importance of intergenerational relations and solidarity and the prevention of intergenerational conflicts should be emphasized. Initiatives to promote intergenerational solidarity should begin or facilitated through building alliances between young and older people organizations.