



Expert Group Meeting

**“Protecting the Arab Family from Poverty:
Employment, Social Integration and Intergenerational Solidarity “
Doha 2-3 June 2013**

RECOMMENDATIONS

GENERAL

- Integrate social and demographic knowledge in policy and programming and ensure that policy makers and service providers are aware of changing patterns of family formation and functioning.
- Engage in processes that can yield legal reforms to recognize women’s productive and reproductive roles in the family and in society. These reforms need to be informed by both juridical traditions and human rights discourses.
- Ensure that national policies are consistent and not contradicting and family laws are in line with labour laws and constitutions.
- Ensure that national laws are in line with international conventions, and encourage all government to ratify and/or implement international treaties pertaining to women, work, and family (e.g., Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women , ILO conventions 156 and 183 related respectively to equal opportunities and equal treatment between men and women and to maternity leave).
- Encourage Governments to ratify the relevant ILO convention on the rights of migrants to support the human rights of migrant workers and domestic workers.
- Strengthen the data collection and monitoring mechanisms for demographic and economic situation of families and develop gendered indicators of well being for individuals and families.
- Collect better statistics, monitor and evaluate policies and improve or adapt them as needed in a timely manner.

CONFRONTING FAMILY POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

- Family should be the focal point of poverty reduction strategy in the MENA region. It is essential to identify poor families according to national criteria.
- Social protection in MENA region, particularly in non-GCC countries, is focused on occupation-related benefits which mainly covers workers in the formal sector, or about 30 per cent of the population. Effective anti-poverty measures such as family income support are absent, surprisingly, in contrast to much lip service paid to poverty. This should be complemented with social services such as child care and health service.
- With the current estimates of poverty in the region, financing should not be an obstacle to the provision of family allowances and services to the poor. An effective tax system and specific budgeting of family benefits are required.
- More universal policies such as anti-discrimination policies need to supplement specific family oriented policies to save the poor from being permanently dependent on cash transfers. Such policies while being developmental and distributional can also play an important poverty reduction role.
- End child marriage as an integral part of national strategies to reduce poverty in countries where it is practiced to improve the health and well-being of their families.
- Conduct quantitative and qualitative research exploring both the causes and consequences of child marriage and its impact on girls, families and societies and disseminate the results in a timely manner and user friendly format to inform policies and programs aimed at preventing child marriage.
- Provide schools for girls and encourage families (e.g. through financial incentives) to keep their daughters enrolled throughout the secondary education.
- Use the media to get key messages across and raise public awareness about the negative consequences of child marriage.

ENSURING FAMILY - WORK BALANCE

- A rights-based approach should be the basis of work-family harmonization policies. This may be crystallized as women's social and economic rights of citizenship. Investing in such rights-based social policies should not be seen merely as a cost but also as an investment in family well-being.
- Enhance female labor force participation and achieve work-family balance, governments should institute generous maternity leave policies covered by social insurance, along with subsidized and quality childcare facilities. Such policies and facilities benefit individual women and their families while also contributing to social and economic development.

- Design evidence based employment policies, and reduce inequality in opportunity to improve work-family balance (e.g. through part-time, flexible hours, telecommuting, parental leaves provision).
- Redefine labor laws in such a way as to oblige employers to establish childcare in workplaces for both pre-school and school age children,
- Encourage part-time work within the private sector.

SOCIAL PROTECTION

- Social protection provision should not be limited to the major social insurance schemes and safety nets but also encompass family allowances, maternity, paternity and family leaves, and a wide range of services that enable families to survive and thrive and women to engage in both employment and family life.
- Family allowances should be allocated to mothers and not exclusively to fathers.
- Redesign public pension systems to extend coverage to all workers in order to maintain a decent standard of living for older persons.
- Develop non-contributory basic pension benefits.
- Offer public cash transfers for poor families in order to strengthen family, cohesion and intergenerational solidarity.
- Align social security coverage and benefits for workers in the private and public sectors so as to support private sector employment, and include categories of workers which are still excluded in the national social insurance schemes (i.e. migrant workers, domestic workers, workers in small enterprises, etc.)
- Provide unemployment insurance benefits so as to assist the unemployed in returning to formal employment.

ADVANCING SOCIAL INTEGRATION

- Elaborate a sustainable social integration strategy as an integral part of a long term economic vision rather than only addressing a posterior social cost and consequences of economic growth and market failures.
- Social integration strategy should govern different forms of social interventions, pave the way to the progressive transition from contributory social schemes to universal ones allowing the inclusion of youth, women, older persons and informal sector workers.
- Create decent jobs as the principal driver of economic growth and social integration by upgrading the quality of education, reforming the macro-economic environment and encouraging the private sector and mid and small size enterprises to search for higher value added activities and productivity gains.

- Reform family laws to increase the bargaining power of women within the family in accordance with their changing roles.
- Remove barriers to increasing women's status in economic and civic life so their higher status within the family corresponds to a greater role in the society at large.
- Reform public education to increase returns on skills, not diplomas, and invest in quality of education for children from disadvantaged families.