

About Us

Acknowledging the importance of the family in society, the Doha International Family Institute (DIFI) was established in 2006 by Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, Chairperson of Qatar Foundation (QF). It was then known as the Doha International Institute for Family Studies and Development (DIIFSD).

DIFI's mandate is based on the Doha Declaration on the family. This Declaration resulted from the Doha International Conference of the Family, which was organized by the State of Qatar to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the International Year of the Family. The Declaration was noted in a United Nations General Assembly resolution. DIFI has a Special Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON THE FAMILY POLICY IN A CHANGING WORLD: PROMOTING SOCIAL PROTECTION AND INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY



SUMMARY

The United Nations (UN) 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 Family Institute (DIFI), an expert group meeting on the inter-relationship between family policy and the promotion of social protection and intergenerational solidarity, held from 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, analyse 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 UN 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 UN 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 helping with 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 to examine intergenerational solidarity from a family policy perspective in the context of the many changes affecting families.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Preamble

Family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society, and is entitled to protection by society and the state (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art. 16.3). There is a need also to protect the individual rights of all family members. Recognition of the dignity and human rights of all requires social inclusion and the implementation of all existing international human rights instruments, including regional instruments and relevant ILO Conventions. Family policy is geared toward promoting functions of reproduction, care, emotional support, and intergenerational solidarity.

The international community has committed itself to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which substantially impacts the development efforts of all countries and will have an effect on individuals and families. The current economic crisis accentuates the need to protect the most vulnerable segments of the population, and to raise awareness of family issues among nations and societies. The existing situation requires a redoubling of efforts of governments as well as in the private sector to ensure the protection of families, especially those with children. It reinforces the case for universal social protection, ensuring food and nutrition security, and access to basic social services and shelter.

It is important to define and strengthen national institutional mechanisms that specifically address family issues. Countries are invited to choose the most appropriate and effective arrangements that can influence socio-economic policy design and budget allocation from a family perspective. These mechanisms need to be adequately resourced to implement family policies. It also requires better data collection, evidence-based evaluation of policies, for participatory monitoring, and for strengthening the research – policy nexus. This in turn necessitates support from the international community to enhance and promote capacity development efforts.

An integrated, holistic approach to family policy requires a better coordination and collaboration among all stakeholders, including the state, civil society organizations, and the private sector. Families have a stake in this process and must be empowered to participate actively in formulating and assessing family policy. Family policy needs to be embedded in human dignity and uphold the rights of every individual in the family, be gender-sensitive, and observe the rights of children, older persons, and persons with disabilities.

Recommendations at the National Level:

Family policy

General

1. Establish an institutional mechanism, such as a Ministry of Family or focal point for family policy within an existing Ministry, with sufficient organizational, fiscal, and human resources capacity to promote the family as a policy priority, develop family protection measures, ensure that all legislation considers the roles and rights of the family and family members and promote partnership with all family stakeholders at different levels of governance;
2. Integrate the family as an important component into all social development policies, national development plans, and poverty reduction strategies;
3. Adopt a more holistic approach to policies and programs that confront child and family poverty, social exclusion, and the several non-traditional, newer social risks. This holistic approach should be applied to such areas as the reduction of income poverty along with ensuring access to healthcare, education, food security, and social services;
4. Provide for more systematic national data and develop indicators to assess, monitor, evaluate, and support family policies, including data on the major family problems, policy responses and, where possible, their effects;
5. Introduce family studies and family counseling at different instructional levels, for example university, schools, and communities, in order to have qualified personnel providing family social services and state-of-the-art family counseling;
6. Develop policies and support to families in fragile situations, such as refugees, migrant families, and internally displaced persons/families;
7. Recognize, facilitate, and encourage the active role that civil society can play in promoting family issues and advocating for family well-being;
8. Provide appropriate support, with respect for various cultural and ethical values, for the variety of family situations that exist;
9. Partner with the media as a way to better educate people about family issues, such as shared responsibilities of men and women, preventing domestic violence and abuse, addressing the needs of family members with disabilities, as well as reducing harmful stigmas.

Family and gender equality

10. Promote and encourage gender equality, including equal pay for men and women and father involvement in childrearing through paid parental leave for both mothers and fathers;
11. Fully implement policies for the early detection, reporting, and intervention in gender-based violence, domestic violence, and all forms of domestic abuse. Interventions should provide services to the victims, proper law

enforcement protection to the victims, and appropriate consequences for the perpetrators, as well as provide behavioral-change services to the perpetrators;

12. Improve the implementation and enforcement of laws prohibiting harmful traditional practices towards women, children, older persons, persons with disabilities, and/or other family members;
13. Promote gender equality in access and control of productive resources, including property, land, credit, and technologies;
14. Develop not only a supportive legal framework for family policy, but also accompany them with economic and technical-skills enhancing measures that can increase women's productivity.

Childrearing and child protection

15. Encourage responsible parenting as a family policy priority;
16. Give greater attention to children's rights and their entitlement to social protection, using a rights-based approach to policy developments, with due consideration given to where parents fit in with such an approach;
17. Make reductions of child poverty a priority, guided by the MDGs, setting specific targets and monitoring their achievement;
18. Promote and fund high quality early childhood care and education and provide cash benefits and/or services for child-care arrangements;
19. Fully implement policies for the early detection, reporting, and intervention in child abuse, providing appropriate services for the victims and setting severe consequences for the perpetrators while also providing them with services, such as mandatory anger management training and counseling;
20. Take adequate measures to eradicate the practice of child marriage through improving the implementation and enforcement of relevant laws and establishing a minimum age for marriage;
21. Implement policies to prevent and regulate child abandonment, including providing for family welfare and family planning education to reduce the incidence of unintended pregnancies, and develop and improve the foster care system.

Financial support

22. Facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life by promoting gender equality inside the family and adequate changes in working conditions, including the regulation and provision of incentives to the private sector to promote family-friendly working schedules for parents of young children;

23. Facilitate childcare arrangements, such as the public provision of childcare, and evaluate them in terms of their extensiveness, quality, social inclusiveness, affordability, and universality.

Family care

24. Make provisions to set budgetary allocations (cash benefits and services) targeted towards families caring for children or for a disabled or elderly family member.

Social protection and families

1. Develop effective ways and means to support families with low incomes;
2. Stimulate public debate and consultations on family-oriented and child-sensitive social protection policies;
3. Build, and budget for, a national, inclusive and, ideally, universal social protection system to fully establish social protection in society and improve socio-economic security;
4. Adopt and implement broad-based social protection policies to mitigate and counteract the sources of vulnerability, such as chronic crop failures, health epidemics, environmental disasters, and other external shocks, and align these social protection policies to family policy on education, health, housing, and food and nutrition security;
5. Collect reliable data that can be used to develop and monitor policies on social protection and families;
6. Ratify and ensure implementation of all global and regional human rights instruments relevant to social protection and families (Covenants, Convention on the Rights of the Child, regional charters, ILO Conventions, etc);
7. Provide support to families serving as social safety nets in emergency situations;
8. Fully consider family-related values in the process of formulating and implementing social protection systems and long-term development plans, particularly taking note that values and norms related to family can change over time.

Intergenerational solidarity and families

1. Develop a national policy on intergenerational solidarity and the prevention of intergenerational conflicts;
2. Emphasize, in the refinement of future national plans of action on aging in countries facing or contemplating an aged society, the importance of intergenerational relations/solidarity to prevent social exclusion in the community of older persons, especially those with special needs;

3. Begin or facilitate initiatives to promote intergenerational solidarity through building partnerships and cooperation between youth and older person organizations;
4. Facilitate activities to promote intergenerational activities through the establishment of community-based active aging centers, planned and funded by the community and facilitated by older persons' alliances with government and civil society;
5. Disseminate active aging principles of healthy lifestyles, continued participation of people of all ages, especially older persons, and remaining active as long as possible;
6. **Develop a minimal set of data for measuring active aging, including its intergenerational component, reflecting both process as well as outcome indicators;**
7. Provide security, in its various forms, for older persons as early as possible, both informally and formally, based on the socio-cultural and socio-economic conditions of individual countries;
8. Place more emphasis on the social protection of disadvantaged older persons and persons with disabilities;
9. Develop ways to measure, monitor, and evaluate intergenerational solidarity and social exclusion in communities;
10. **Promote awareness of the first demographic dividend (which entails the relative abundance of the labor force as a result of fertility reduction, and is transitory in nature), and the second demographic dividend (which is induced by the extension of life, and could be permanent in nature, subject to policies to be adopted), and optimize the use of these dividends to strengthen intergenerational solidarity;**
11. Promote national research on the patterns of intergenerational transfers, both public and private, focusing on the implications of these transfers for individuals, families and societies and using this analysis in the design of national development plans;
12. Introduce policy measures to prevent elder abuse or neglect by caregivers, such as family members and institutional caregivers;
13. Promote policies and programs geared toward assessing the vulnerability of younger and older generations and the reduction or prevention of risk through various social protection strategies, including long-term healthcare support and its oversight, and co-residence with family members or friends.

Recommendations to the International Community:

Family policy

1. Provide for more systematic regional data on child well-being, including data on the major child/family problems, and best practices in policy responses, and where possible, their effects;
2. Invite regional intergovernmental entities to facilitate the exchange of good policies and practices and promote family policies;
3. Identify, and ensure follow-up support to, the factors that enable or lead to constructive family policy developments.

Social protection and families

1. Encourage regional social policies, including cooperation on social protection issues, and promote regional strategies for the implementation of a minimal social protection package;
2. Work within the UN system for a social protection floor or minimum social protection package, ensuring access to basic social services, shelter, and empowerment and protection of the poor and vulnerable;
3. Align national legislation and economic policies across regions to create a "high road" of decent work and social protection;
4. Work with regional bodies to advocate for universal social protection;
5. Promote the cross-border portability of rights, such as rights to social security, healthcare, and education;
6. Encourage continued support for social protection, especially to low-income countries, from the international community.

Recommendations to the United Nations Family:

1. It is recommended that all relevant UN departments, funds and programs contribute to develop strategies aimed at strengthening family policies, taking into account that the family is a vital partner for the achievement of the MDGs;
2. Seize the opportunity, in light of the G20 Summit outcome, of the emerging global fiscal space and paradigm shift to advocate for universal, rights-based social protection for all, building on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the renewed commitment of the international community to social justice and economic growth;
3. Advocate for, and devise, a joint mechanism of the international financial institutions and the UN system for the common articulation and implementation of additional financing for the most vulnerable.