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Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)
Division for Inclusive Social Development

Concept Note

United Nations Expert Group Meeting
in preparation for the 30th anniversary of the International Year of Family, 2024
New York, 7-8 September 2022

Megatrends & Families: Focus on Digital Technologies, Migration and Urbanization

The Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD) of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) is organizing an Expert Group Meeting on “Megatrends and Families: Focus on Digital Technologies, Migration and Urbanization” to be held 7-8 September 2022.

The meeting will build on the findings of the Expert Group Meeting held in 2020 which focused, inter alia, on the modalities for the preparations of the 30th anniversary of the International Year of the Family (IYF+30). The meeting recommended focusing on several megatrends to guide the preparations. Those recommendations were reflected in the Reports of the Secretary-General (2020-2021).¹ In 2021, General Assembly resolution on the Preparations for the IYF+30 endorsed those recommendations and advised to focus on the trends of new technologies, migration, urbanization as well as demographic trends and climate change as part of the preparations for IYF+30.

In accordance with the afore mentioned resolution and relevant United Nations mandates, the Expert Group Meeting is to address the technological, migration and urbanization trends and their impact on families.²

¹ A/76/61-E/2021/4 & A/77/61-E/2022/4

² Demographic trends and climate change will be addressed at an Expert Group Meeting to be held in 2024.

Megatrends and families

Technological change, migration and urbanization have very significant and often overlooked family dimensions. The fast pace of change brought about by those trends impact family wellbeing in both positive and negative ways. Families can benefit from the new opportunities that may accompany those trends. At the same time some aspects of these trends may lead to family fragmentation, unsustainable urban development and deepening digital divide among others.

Digital technologies

There has been an unprecedented technological transformation over the past decades with improvements in big data, machine learning, the Internet of Things, artificial intelligence and cloud computing. Distance work and learning have become prevalent during COVID-19 crisis with long-lasting consequences for family life including work-family balance.

Technology use in families fosters connectedness and helps transnational families keep in touch but its nefarious effects have been also observed, linked especially to online addiction and abuse.

Although technology trends and their impact on family wellbeing have been addressed to some extent³, especially vis a vis work-family balance and parenting education, further focus is needed on topics including interlinkages between technological change and migration and urbanization, technology, and digital and financial inclusion as well as uneven progress in access to the internet and digital technologies at regional levels.

Migration

Migration-related issues are visible throughout the 2030 Agenda (SDG Target 10.7 highlights ensuring safe and orderly migration) and elsewhere at the United Nations forum and focusing on migrants and their families through effective policies grows in importance and deserves more attention.

³ See Susan K. Walker *Technology Use and Families: Implications for Work-Family Balance and Parenting Education*, May 2021: Report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of the objectives of the International Year of the Family and its follow-up processes (A/77/61-E/2022/4).

As transnational families become more common, Governments have responded with stricter policy and legal frameworks with many tightening their borders and laws to deter specific groups of migrants from entering and from attaining permanent residencies in their societies. Laws that prevent migrants from having family members visit or reside with them have also become common in many places around the world. “From a family perspective, these policies have served to fragment households and to highlight inequalities and interdependencies between individuals and families, and communities and entire regions.”⁴

Importantly, migration is not limited to economic benefits but involves better opportunities for migrants including acquiring of new skills and higher educational levels depending on opportunities provided in the host country. Still, negative consequences of migration, including family fragmentation, loss of close connections as well as negative mental health consequences is undeniable. What’s more as it is becoming more common for individuals and families to migrate as a response to climate change in their local environments, migration is associated with the loss of social support networks and volatile, precarious livelihoods in urban areas.⁵

Remittances are a primary form of income for many households in countries of origin and a financial safety net for their members. They are also critical for economies, constituting over 10 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in many countries. Remittances contribute to poverty reduction, better health, and educational outcomes as well as gender equality. Recently, the issues of digital and financial inclusion as relating to remittances has been gaining more attention and requires urgent action in terms of digital and financial inclusion.

Urbanization

Sustainable urbanization and affordable housing, fundamental to family formation and family life are featured in Sustainable Development Goal 11. World Urbanization Prospects reports indicate continuing rapid urbanization trends estimating that in 2050, two thirds of world’s population will be urban dwellers.

⁴ Bahira Sherif Trask “*Migration, Urbanization and the Family Dimension*”, May 2022

⁵ Ibid

Unsustainable urbanization has often resulted in urban poverty disproportionately affecting families with children. Families often lack access to education, food and health services with breadwinners mostly in informal employment lacking access to services.

The New Urban Agenda advocates for intergenerational perspective in designing family-friendly cities with some approaches gaining ground as city planners, backed by local communities designing intergenerational sites, including schools and retirements homes built in close proximity.⁶ Such approach needs more advocacy efforts and reliable financing.

Interlinkages between the technological, migration and urbanization trends and policy response

There are many interlinkages between technological innovations, migration and urbanization. For instance, digital technologies facilitate communication in transnational families, contributing to social cohesion. They can streamline the transfer and receipt of remittances saving on costs and contributing to financial inclusion. Migration and urbanization are closely related as unsustainable rural to urban migration flows may exacerbate unsustainable urban development.

Despite many linkages, policy responses are often fragmented and do not address current megatrends in a systematic way. Voluntary national review process has a potential to highlight progress made and challenges remaining. Consequently, the EGM will address the progress made so far and highlight good practices in this area.

Purpose of the meeting

The primary objective of the Meeting is to bring together experts to discuss and explore the issues noted above. The conclusions and recommendations of this meeting will provide Member States and other stakeholders with expert analysis regarding a number of issues impacting recent family policy developments in the context of megatrends.

The findings and recommendations from the Expert Group Meeting will be reflected in the upcoming Report of the Secretary-General on the

⁶ “Urbanization and Families” UN Chronicle article available from <https://www.un.org/en/un-chronicle/urbanization-and-families>

Preparations for and observance of the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family.

Methodology

Experts are asked to provide a paper; make a short presentation; participate in group discussions and give their expert opinion and policy recommendations on family policy development, monitoring and implementation in the areas mentioned above. The experts are also expected to provide specific examples of good practices on topics under discussion and offer detailed recommendations on further development of policies, programmes and strategies supporting families in the areas noted above.

Outcomes

Background papers (5-7 pages, single-spaced, excluding references, figures, and statistical tables) prepared by each expert on issues in the annotated agenda and including policy recommendations. Report of the meeting containing the summary of discussion and policy recommendations prepared by DISD/DESA.

Papers by experts will cover issues identified in the agenda, explain their relevance, provide quantitative and qualitative evidence, analyse the roles of social institutions, give examples of good practices, offer conclusions and recommendations. The report and experts' papers will be posted on the website of the DISD/DESA.

Organizational matters

The in-person meeting with possible online participation of some experts and observers, will be held at United Nations Headquarter in New York, 7-8 September 2022, from 9:30 am to 17:00 pm (EST, NY time).

A minimum of ten experts will participate in the Expert Group Meeting. Experts will include academics from the fields of family policy, new technologies, migration, urbanization, and other related issues. Experts will be representing various regions and will participate in the meeting in their personal capacities. Each expert is required to provide a short presentation

based on his/her written paper (not exceeding 15 minutes). The presenters should submit their papers to the UN Secretariat by **15 August 2022**.

The participants will meet in several working sessions.

- Each session will have brief introductory remarks or presentation/s (power point is encouraged but not required) by expert/s which will introduce the topic and provide context for ensuing discussion.
- A moderator for each session will lead the group discussion and will be responsible for a brief summary and compiling the recommendations from each session.
- Discussions and brainstorming will be the preferred method of work and no formal conference style presentations are envisioned.
- The working language of the meeting will be English. There will be no interpretation provided. All submissions should be made available to the Secretariat in English.

Other arrangements

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