



**United
Nations**

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs

Expert Group Meeting Families and Climate Change New York 15-16 May 2024

Concept note

The Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD) of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) is organizing an expert group meeting on “Families and Climate Change” to be held in New York on 15-16 May 2024.

In line with General Assembly resolutions recommending research and analysis of megatrends, this meeting will explore: (1) climate change and its impact on families; (2) the role of families in climate action; (3) Indigenous perspectives on climate change and sustainable family farming; and (4) the interlinkages between climate change and demographic trends, forced migration and displacement, sustainable urbanization and new technologies.

Climate change and its impact on families

Families’ vulnerability to climate change is manifested in the increasing frequency of extreme weather events, including hurricanes, droughts, floods and wildfires, often leading to displacement, property damage and loss of livelihoods. Food and water scarcity affects agricultural productivity and water availability, and thus families’ ability to access food and clean water. Changing climate patterns also influence the spread of diseases and exacerbate respiratory conditions, placing additional burdens on families’ healthcare needs. Moreover, families often rely on industries that are sensitive to climate impacts, such as agriculture, fisheries and tourism. Changes in these sectors can have economic implications for families’ income and stability.

Despite such impacts, there is a limited focus on how we can approach climate change from a family perspective. There is also insufficient research on how family-oriented policies can contribute to climate action and what families themselves can do to help with the achievement of specific targets under relevant Sustainable Development Goals, in particular SDG13 focusing on climate action as well as other goals intersecting with SDG13, such as poverty and hunger reduction, health and well-being, education, climate-induced migration and sustainable urbanization.

Most approaches and investments in climate change focus on advanced technologies, such as electrical or carbon neutral cars and devices, but there is little focus on the role of families and community power and of the centrality of the home amidst societal shifts in the economy, mobility, infrastructure and livelihoods.

Although families are key in addressing climate change through their actions and consumer choices, a family perspective is mostly overlooked in broader initiatives. Sustainable lifestyles can be nurtured in families, and thus it is important to empower families to play an effective role in the global response to combat climate change.

Notably, **families** play a crucial role in promoting environmental sustainability through education and instilling good habits and values that contribute to a greener lifestyle. By teaching children about energy conservation and responsible consumption, families can encourage mindful, energy-efficient practices. Emphasizing the importance of reusing and recycling materials within the household fosters a culture of waste reduction and resource conservation.

Furthermore, families can exemplify the practice of "**voting with your wallet**" by making environmentally conscious purchasing decisions and supporting eco-friendly products and businesses that prioritize sustainability.¹ Through education and modelling environmentally friendly behaviours, families not only reduce their ecological footprint but also empower future generations to become informed and proactive stewards of the planet.

Moreover, families play a pivotal role in **advocating for climate solutions**. By participating in local environmental groups or community-based initiatives, families can amplify their voices and mobilize collective action toward sustainable practices and policies. Additionally, parents can actively engage with schools to ensure comprehensive environmental education, advocating for curriculum integration and extracurricular activities that foster eco-consciousness among students. Encouraging discussions on climate change and sustainability within households can empower children to become agents of change in their communities. Through these efforts, families not only contribute to raising awareness but also inspire broader societal shifts towards a more resilient and environmentally conscious future.

Indigenous perspectives on climate change and sustainable family farming

Recognizing and incorporating Indigenous perspectives and knowledge into climate change discourse and policymaking is essential for fostering resilience, promoting biodiversity and conservation, advancing climate justice and reversing the damage of fossil-fuel based modes of production and consumption. Valuing, respecting and learning from the cultures of Indigenous Peoples deserves to be an integral part of climate action and strategy.

¹ Susan Walker (2024) *High-level panel on the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family*

Family farming is estimated to account for approximately 80 per cent of farms worldwide, highlighting the overwhelming prevalence of family farming in global agriculture. Family farms vary widely in size, scale and production methods, but they collectively play a crucial role in feeding populations, supporting rural livelihoods and sustaining agricultural ecosystems. As the role of family farming in food sustainability is not sufficiently recognized or supported, the UN established a Decade for Family Farming (2019-2028) to draw attention of the role of family farming in overall sustainability efforts. It aims, inter alia, to highlight the importance of family farmers in food security, livelihoods, natural resource management and environmental protection and to identify priority policies to support family farmers and agricultural development worldwide.

Sustainable family farming is a crucial component of global food systems, contributing to food security, rural livelihoods, and environmental sustainability.² By prioritizing agroecological principles, sustainable family farms can mitigate the impacts of climate variability while promoting biodiversity and ecosystem health.³ Furthermore, the integration of traditional knowledge and Indigenous practices into sustainable farming approaches enhances adaptive capacity and fosters resilience within farming communities. However, challenges such as access to resources, market dynamics and policy support remain barriers to scaling up sustainable farming practices and ensuring their long-term viability. Addressing these challenges will require multi-stakeholder collaboration, supportive policies and agricultural research to empower family farmers and enhance sustainable development.⁴

Interlinkages between climate change and other megatrends

Climate change is closely linked to other megatrends analysed as part of the preparations for IYF+30. **High fertility rates** in certain regions can be seen as posing challenges to sustainability, but the countries contributing most to unsustainable patterns of production and consumption are mostly those with high per capita incomes and low fertility, not those growing rapidly with low per capita incomes.⁵ High fertility rates in regions of the global South correlate with lower levels of educational attainment and economic development⁶; hindering efforts to implement sustainable practices and technologies. However, it is essential to approach this issue holistically, considering cultural, socioeconomic and policy factors. By empowering individuals with access to education, health care, and family planning information and services, countries can achieve population stabilization.

² Issa Ibrahim Berchin et al. (2019) *The contributions of public policies for strengthening family farming and T increasing food security: The case of Brazil*

³ David Wueppera, Stefan Wimmerb, Johannes Sauerb (2019) *Is small family farming more environmentally sustainable? Evidence from a T spatial regression discontinuity design in Germany*

⁴ Berchin et al

⁵ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/un-desa-policy-brief-no-130-why-population-growth-matters-for-sustainable-development/>

⁶ Adebayo K. Sunmola, Johnson S. Olaosebikan, Temitope J. Adeusi (2020) *High fertility level in Sub-Saharan Africa: implication for reaping and optimizing demographic dividend.*

On the other hand, emerging research demonstrates that there exists a climate-change induced **anxiety in family formation** among young people. This trend has been occurring in Europe and to the lesser degree in the rest of the Global North. A recent extensive study published by The Lancet found that 40 per cent of Generation Z individuals (born between 1996 and 2009) worldwide are hesitant to have children due to concerns about the climate crisis. Similar sentiments have been echoed in surveys of millennials (born between 1981 and 1995).⁷

Forced migration and dislocation are common outcomes of adverse climate events, such as droughts, floods and land degradation. These events often lead to the displacement of vulnerable populations, exacerbating existing social and economic challenges. Climate-induced migration disrupts livelihoods, strains resources and triggers conflicts over limited resources.⁸ It has also been linked to increased health risks, such as vector-borne illnesses spreading through contaminated water supplies. In this context, disaster risk reduction and sustainable urbanization strategies are key to mitigate the drivers of forced migration.

Sustainable urbanization is a challenge as cities face the severity of extreme climate events.⁹ Adaptation and mitigation strategies in tandem with sustainable management are essential to achieve sustainable urbanization. Adopting nature-based solution mimicking natural ecosystems to increase climate resilience and incorporating green building standards and green spaces into designs of smart cities can improve air quality, biodiversity and the overall well-being of city dwellers.¹⁰

New technologies hold immense potential in both preventing and mitigating climate change across various sectors. In energy production, advancements in renewable energy sources are leading to reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.¹¹ Smart grids and energy storage systems lead to efficient energy usage and reduction of waste.¹² Additionally, advancements in carbon capture and utilization technologies enable the removal of CO₂ from the atmosphere, helping to mitigate the effects of past emissions.¹³ Agency at the industry and corporation levels is key, but government oversight and policies are also necessary. Moreover, digital technologies enabling working from home contribute to the reduction in transportation to and from workplaces, thus reducing air pollution and traffic congestion.

⁷ <https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S2542-5196%2821%2900278-3>

⁸ Bahira Trask (2024) *High-level panel on the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, 2024*

⁹ Raffaele Laforteza and Giovanni Sanesi (2018) *Nature-based solutions: Settling the issue of sustainable urbanization*.

¹⁰ S. Tong and K. Ebi (2019) *Preventing and mitigating health risks of climate change*, J Jorge Ochoa et al. (2018) *Learning from best practices in sustainable urbanization*

¹¹ Deborah Panepinto, Vincenzo A. Riggio, and Mariachiara Zanetti (2021) *Analysis of the Emergent Climate Change Mitigation Technologies*

¹² Duran-Romero et al. and Okem et al. (2024) *Civil engineering and disaster resilience: A review of innovations in building safe and sustainable communities*.

¹³ Gemma Duran-Romero et al. (2020) *Bridging the gap between circular economy and climate change mitigation policies through eco-innovations and Quintuple Helix Model*

Despite many linkages between climate change and other megatrends, policy responses have been fragmented and do not address current linkages in a systematic way. The EGM will address the potential of family-centred approaches to tackle the above-mentioned linkages in an effective and sustainable way and highlight good practices in some areas.

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 the meeting will provide Member States and other stakeholders with expert analysis regarding several issues related to 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 to the 79th session of the General Assembly on the 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 opinions 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 to offer detailed recommendations on the further development of policies, programmes and strategies to support 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 a summary of the 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, and 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 Headquarters in New York on 15-16 May 2024 from 9:00 am to 17:00 pm (EDT, i.e., “summer time” in NYC).

Experts will include academics from fields covering various aspects of climate change, family policy, new technologies, migration, urbanization, demographic trends and other related issues. Experts from various regions 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 **1 May 2024**.

The participants will meet in several working sessions.

- Each session will have brief introductory remarks or (a) presentation(s) by (an) expert(s), which will introduce the topic and provide context for the ensuing discussion (use of PowerPoint is encouraged but not required).
- A moderator for each session will lead the group discussion and be responsible for a summary and compiling the recommendations from that 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, and there will be no interpretation provided. All submissions should be made available to the Secretariat in English.

Other arrangements

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Annex

Article 6 of the FCCC

In carrying out their commitments under Article 4, paragraph 1 (i), the Parties shall:

(a) Promote and facilitate at the national and, as appropriate, subregional and regional levels, and in accordance with national laws and regulations, and within their respective capacities:

(i) The development and implementation of educational and public awareness programmes on climate change and its effects;

(ii) Public access to information on climate change and its effects;

(iii) Public participation in addressing climate change and its effects and developing adequate responses; and

(iv) Training of scientific, technical and managerial personnel;

(b) Cooperate in and promote, at the international level, and, where appropriate, using existing bodies:

(i) The development and exchange of educational and public awareness material on climate change and its effects; and

(ii) The development and implementation of education and training programmes, including the strengthening of national institutions and the exchange or secondment of personnel to train experts in this field, in particular for developing countries.

Article 12 of the Paris Agreement

Parties shall cooperate in taking measures, as appropriate, to enhance climate change education, training, public awareness, public participation and public access to information, recognizing the importance of these steps with respect to enhancing actions under this Agreement.