



Changing Demographics Can Result in Strengthening Families



Expert Symposium Report
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United Nations

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs

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Introduction

In preparation for the 30th observance of the International Year of the Family (IYF+30) in 2024, Generations United held this expert symposium in Washington D.C. on July 25, 2023, as part of its annual global conference. Generations United was founded in 1986 to argue for a caring society, one that values the bookend generations - the older and the younger - and fights back against efforts to pit generations against each other eroding the social compact and intergenerational solidarity.

This high-level forum brought together 17 experts spanning academia, civil society organizations, UN officials, and intergenerational lived experience representatives, to engage in three panel discussions highlighting changing demographics and their impact on families, specifically within the context of the changing roles of older adults in families and civil society supports for multigenerational families. Participants discussed and developed policy recommendations and priorities designed to encourage intergenerational solidarity and foster connections among transnational civil society organizations and independent experts to strengthen productive engagement towards equitable intergenerational policies at the United Nations level.



Photo of the symposium experts courtesy of: Generations United

Generations have always been, and will continue to be, interdependent to survive and thrive. Around the world demographic shifts in population aging, urbanization, and migration have been creating new paradigms that influence every aspect of global communities' health, well-being, economic prospects, and security. Families as foundations of our global communities and societies are also impacted by these demographic changes.

Generations United Executive Director, Donna Butts opened the symposium by reinforcing this: "In 1948, the United Nations declared the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by the state and society. Much has changed since 1948, but the value of family, in all ways that we define family, continues to be a cornerstone of our civil societies." As highlighted by Renata Kaczmarek, UN DESA Focal Point on Family, since the establishment of the International Day of the Family observation by the United Nations in 1994, focus has been placed on family poverty, work-family balance, and intergenerational solidarity. However, family, child, and elder policies have not kept pace with changing demographics and their impact on families, as was highlighted by lived experience expert Ms. Victoria Gray in her opening remarks. Ms. Gray, from Arizona, USA, along with her husband of 47 years has fostered 41 children and adopted seven of their grandchildren. In 1993, they received \$17 a month for their granddaughter who had complex medical needs, while receiving \$500 a month for supporting her brother, simply because he joined their family as a foster child. Committed to raising their biological grandchildren alongside their foster grandchildren, they exhausted their retirement and savings. She now uses her experience as an advocate and NGO leader to

support kinship and grandfamilies, so “no family will suffer the abandonment and the financial burden that my family did to help support our grandchildren.”

Bridging Generations: Demographic shifts and evolving families

Globally, we have entered a new social era regarding families. “Families for many centuries were the cornerstone of society. Nowadays families have different ways of helping societies. But they need help from governments and the UN to do it,” stated Ignacio Socias, director of international relations at the International Federation for Family Development, in opening remarks. As societies evolve, family structures and dynamics change, necessitating promising practices and policy changes that support kinship across generations.¹

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, a variety of global demographic trends have accompanied ideological and structural changes with respect to families. Dr. Bahira Trask, Professor and Chair of the Department of Human Development and Family Sciences at the University of Delaware highlights that “understanding these social transformations and the roles and relationships of individuals and families within them, is critical in order to ensure the sustainability of our world.”

Dr. Trask illustrated these demographic shifts by highlighting declining fertility rates and the aging of many human populations [See Figure 1]. **As global demographics increasingly reflect “beanpole” families, wherein multiple generations are living at the same time, policies designed to support families necessitate a review of family, aging, and child policy through an all-ages lens.**

Family types are becoming increasingly varied, including more lone-parent families which disproportionately are headed by women (about 84.3%), who have children, are working, and may also be caring for other close

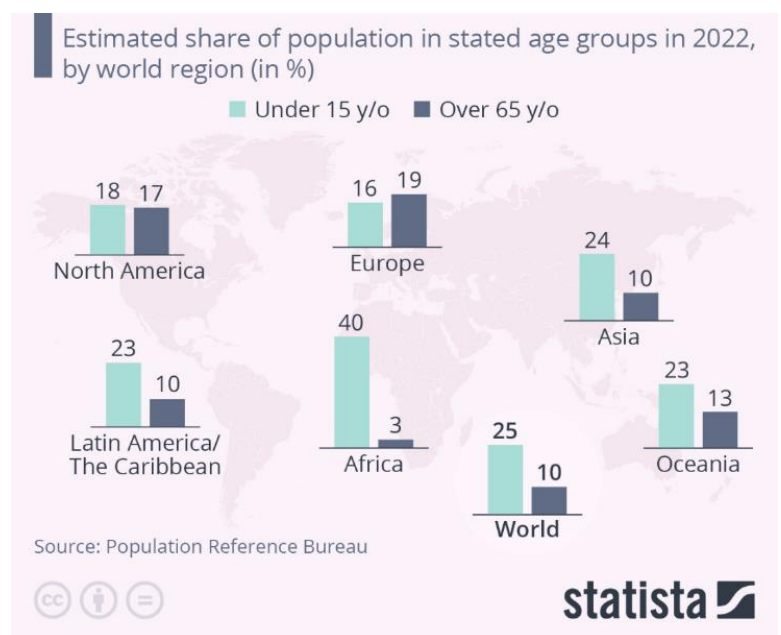


Figure 1: Changing global demographics

Source: <https://www.statista.com/chart/28583/share-of-world-population-under-15-over-65-by-region/>

“We didn’t ask to be caregivers. We don't want to raise everybody's kids. We are not doing this because we want to take these children away from their parents. We want their parents to be protected and have the services and the support that they need in our communities, not somewhere else. Same as for caring for our moms and dads. We want to work together with people who can do things about the things we are experiencing.”

– Robyn Wind, GRAND Voices Support Coordinator, Generations United and “Sandwich” caregiver

relatives.² These female-headed households with children are often financially vulnerable and may even be stigmatized and discriminated against depending on social and cultural context.³

BOX 1: Lived Experience Expert Voice

Adopting a Strengths-based Approach in Family Policy

AnnaMarie White, a Generations United GRAND Voice from the state of Montana, is raising her three granddaughters due to their mother’s mental health and substance use issues. She invites policy makers to approach family policy from a strengths-based approach and to consider the perspective of the impact of the term “adverse childhood experiences” on the outcomes of children and families versus the alternative used by programs like the Hope Project led by Tufts Medical Center (<https://positiveexperience.org/>) in the United States which prioritize a paradigm shift to recognize positive alongside adverse childhood experiencing. In so doing instilling an empowering message of hope and, “to offer the alternative of what we CAN have instead!”

AnnaMarie, a member of the Cherokee Nation, highlights the need for lived experience inclusion in policy design and training of providers: “Policy needs to be looked at from the perspective of the provider and the child. There needs to be a perspective of what it is like to live this situation from the perspective of those who are living it.” Additionally, she recognizes the harm faced by children raised in kinship care when messaging and visibility of grandfamilies is unrecognized: “Grandchildren can see from their peers that they are different. It is important for us to have more dialogue and narratives, so we have a larger discourse about grandfamilies, and we normalize this.”

Demographic change in families due to delayed parenthood and increased longevity implies that older adults increasingly find themselves demographically sandwiched between aging parents and adult offspring often with children of their own,⁴ thereby increasing demands for support and care from this “mature” middle generation. This “*mature sandwich generation*” is increasingly becoming a dominant part of the population, with estimates suggesting that about a third to almost half of individuals over fifty are generationally sandwiched.⁵ Often, these “sandwiched” individuals provide social support to aging parents and adult children ranging from housekeeping, looking after grandchildren, personal care, and financial and bureaucratic support.⁶

Within families, reliance on grandparents and other relatives to raise children has increased dramatically around the world. Many factors can prevent parents from being able to raise their children, leading to the formation of grandfamilies – families in which the grandparents and other relatives raise children. Examples of this include sub-Saharan Africa where a consequence of the global HIV/AIDS epidemic,⁷ the United States due in part to the Opioid epidemic and COVID-19 pandemic and parts of Asia where distant but better job prospects cause parents to leave behind their children with grandparents.⁸ Decades of research show that these children thrive due to this solidarity, and the relatives help children buffer the effects of trauma caused by the situation leading their parents to be unable to parent them.⁹ In the United States, where 8 million children live in households headed by grandparents or other relatives,¹⁰ despite the vast benefits they offer, grandfamilies face an array of challenges due to existing legal and policy systems are not designed to support grandfamilies in thriving. **There is a need for policy initiatives that think of children within the context of the entire family and community.**

As youth employment is more vulnerable under volatile economic conditions, they become more

“We need more encompassing recognition of the importance of family in all policies, not just family policy, but also in education policy or work policy such as family leave. When we talk about family leave, for example, we should include grandparents who are taking care of grandchildren as well.”

– Dr. Leng Leng Thang

reliant on their parents for financial support.¹¹ Research from the European Union and the United States illuminates the extent to which economics plays a role in changing families. As summarized by Dr. Trask, younger people are having a harder time economically and families are supporting them more (52% of young adults over 21 are moving back home)¹² resulting in an increase in multigenerational households. A growing number of young people need family financial support to enter the next phases of their lives, such as for educational investments, and/or buying or renting their own homes. Without these supports it becomes very difficult for young people to enter stable long-term relationships and start their own families.¹³ Also, the growing popularity of multi-generational living arrangements in the West is another sign that family solidarity is not necessarily weakening as is so often suggested by the media and in the academic literature.¹⁴ **Instead, of just emphasizing family dissolution in our work, we also need to examine which factors lead to and/or promote increased family solidarity including opportunities for the integration, interdependence, and reciprocity of youth and the elderly,** suggests Dr. Trask.

BOX 2: Best Practice Example

Public Campaigns Encourage Intergenerational Solidarity (Singapore)

Singapore is one of the fastest aging countries in the world. By 2030, 1 in 4 Singaporeans are projected to be 65 and over. Family is recognized “as the basic unit of society” and as the first line of support in Singapore. The government has long recognized the importance of strong families, where pro-family policies and programs are implemented with the aim of strengthening families and their capacity to care for family members. Attitudes toward family as a strong pillar of support are high (93% report having close-knit families (2019 – Social Attitudes of Singaporeans survey)).

2023 marked the debut of the refreshed Action Plan to Successful Aging with a foundation of 3 C’s: Care, Contribution and Connectedness, with an intergenerational attention to all themes. Recognizing the significant role older persons play in child care (30% of grandparents care for grandchildren) as well as the role of value transmission to the young, the Singaporean government enabled public campaigns such as the National Family Week celebrating 3 generations and the formation of the Families for Life council, under the Ministry of Social and Family Development, which is active in promoting family bonding.



Photo courtesy of: Dr. Leng Leng Thang
A postcard picture to promote Gen3Fund Inter-School Competition, 2005

While intergenerational support provided by the sandwich generation reflects norms and positive values of family solidarity¹⁵ its positioning as mid-layer in a multi-generational structure may also be a source of competing demands and potential role conflict¹⁶ with deleterious consequences. Longitudinal analysis in 2022 of 63,000 individuals 50+ across 20 European nations illuminated the disproportionately negative effect the resulting condition of social sandwiching has on the mental health of older women but not older men,¹⁷ undoubtedly since up to 81% of formal and informal care is provided by women.¹⁸ Moreover, this negative impact is heterogeneous, even within European countries, where social supports vary significantly geographically. Countries in continental, southern, and eastern Europe with less social supports carry

“Kinship care is regarded as extended family care [rather than primary care]. Grandparents are just as likely, if not more likely, to face burnout and we need to face this in policy discussions.”

– Terrance Owens, Generations United Youth Kinship Leader

a significantly higher deleterious impact on mental health than Nordic countries, where social programs are relatively generous. [See Figure 2]. Analysis of European data suggests that policies in the form of cash payment, respite care, or in-home assistance would not only benefit the well-being of sandwiched older family support providers but would likely benefit all generations by allowing this pivot generation the resources needed to better assist younger and older generations, states Dr. Merrill Silverstein, Marjorie Cantor Chair in Aging Studies at Syracuse University. He continues, **“The issue of elder-friendly policies should not be viewed exclusively as an old-age benefit but as a family-systems benefit that strengthens all forms of intergenerational solidarity.” Exploring best practices that promote generational cooperation and developing policies that incentivize intergenerational solidarity, can ensure good health and well-being across generations.**

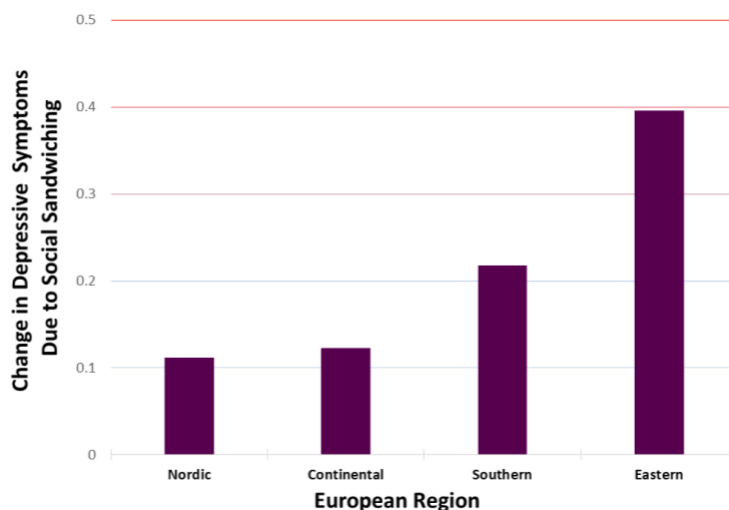


Figure 2: Depressive symptoms among 50+ "sandwiched" adults
Source: Dr. Merrill Silverstein

In most places, family policies and programs were developed at a time when families looked less complex than they do today. There is a critical need for appropriate programs and policies that are responsive to key social and family conditions under various dynamic conditions. In addition, as an increasing number of individuals and families migrate within and between countries, multicultural aging issues will become a greater concern in societies across the world. This is a significant new development because it affects policies that are being developed to support societies with growing older adult populations. “One size fits all” policy and programming solutions for supporting families and enhancing intergenerational interdependence are thus not effective options. Member states can consider programs and policies that alleviate caregiver burden and enable families to thrive.

“We live in the United States and all come from diverse spaces. We forget that different cultures have different approaches.”
- Abby Nelson, Generations United Youth Kinship Leader

Debunking generational conflict: Communication among generations

Individuals develop their beliefs, attitudes, and values within the context of family relationships.¹⁹ Although parents serve as the most influential source of core social values to their children,²⁰ grandparents are also important agents of influence in the development of their grandchildren. Research has shown that grandparents commonly provide emotional and financial support to their grandchildren, engage in shared activities with them, and socialize them

“The components of the intergenerational solidarity paradigm are like strands of a rope, the more strands that you have, the stronger are the binds that keep society together.”
- Dr. Merrill Silverstein

to values both secular and religious.²¹ Dr. Silverstein and global collaborators developed an empirical model of the influence of grandparents on the attitudes of grandchildren on family elder care. This study highlighted how formative interaction between grandparents and grandchildren resulted in strengthened filial elder care of grandchildren through a strong emotional connection to grandparents and greater altruistic tendencies. Thus, grandparents exerted an elder-friendly influence on their grandchildren by instilling empathy in a personal way by fostering stronger relationships with grandchildren and in a general way by forging compassionate concern for less fortunate individuals.

Individuals across multiple generations have common goals and concerns. Cooperation between generations can lead to better policies, resource allocation, and social programs that benefit everyone, says Ignacio Socias. Mr. Socias continues, “By engaging in open and respectful dialogue, individuals from different age groups can better understand and appreciate each other's values. This understanding promotes empathy and cooperation, allowing for the blending of traditional and modern perspectives and the development of shared values that transcend generational boundaries.” **Efficient communication channels, both formal and informal, such as family interactions, community programs, mentorship initiatives, and intergenerational activities, play a crucial role in facilitating the exchange of knowledge, values, and skills among generations. By embracing open and respectful communication, societies can harness the collective wisdom, experiences, and talents of all age groups, creating a harmonious and inclusive environment.**

The Promise of Changing Demographics – Good Practices to Strengthen Families

The identification and analysis of good practices serve as vital illustrations of how social interventions and activities can generate impactful outcomes and act as catalysts for the development of better and innovative

Box 3: Best Practice Example

Intergenerational Collaboration Toward Community Building (Uganda)

Older persons in Uganda make a critical contribution to younger generations, engaging in work and providing care for multigenerational families. By 2050, the number of older persons in sub-Saharan Africa is projected to more than triple. 63% of orphans in Uganda are under the care of older persons. Up to 1/3 of older women live in skipped generation households with responsibility for their grandchildren. The same number of children in skipped generation households provide care for older persons.

One such older adult is Rehema (see image). Rehema is responsible for the needs of her grandchildren. Rehema is a leader with the local Older Persons Group. She actively advocates for the role of grandmothers to improve the health of her family and community. Rehema has a dream for an intergenerational school she calls “Pamoja” which means together in Swahili, where elders can support young people who have not been able to continue their secondary school education to learn how to make and market traditional crafts.

Rehema is a participant in the Health Nest Uganda program under the directorship of Namara Arthur Araali with Kristin Bodiford. Health Nest Uganda uses an intergenerational co-design approach to unite older adults and youth to identify solutions that work for their community. In so doing, Health Nest Uganda is supporting an intergenerational and family-centered approach to improve health and well-being across the life course.



Photo courtesy of: Health Nest Uganda

policies. The following reflections from independent experts frame best practice models for intergenerational interdependence and solidarity and provide specific examples of regional policy approaches that support families by adopting this approach.

“This is not a theoretical discussion. This is a discussion grounded in practice.”

- José Alejandro Vázquez, International Federation for Family Development

Solidarity between generations in a changing society

There have been significant changes in societal and family demographics that are fundamentally changing the nature of social relations.²² Increasingly, intergenerational relations happen within as well as outside the family. An interdependence of family exists beyond the nuclear unit. Within this paradigm four salient ways exist to foster intergenerational solidarity: 1) broaden social relations, 2) consider the role of environmental contexts to shape interactions between generations and resulting relationships, 3) consider the role of volunteering among older generations, and 4) apply new communication technologies.

Intergenerational relationships do not exist in a vacuum. Diversity of ties is crucial in contributing to the cognitive and physical health and wellbeing of older persons and younger persons alike. The environmental composition of communities has significant repercussions for social cohesion across generations. Dr. Noah Webster highlights the extent to which social composition matters within neighborhoods. Research indicates that older adults living in neighborhoods with a greater proportion of younger persons (< 18 years old) have smaller social networks (i.e., fewer people they consider close and important), which may be linked with less engagement with others in their neighborhood. In fact, without purposeful design to generate intergenerational contact zones, older persons have been found to disengage and use public spaces, such as parks, less, only furthering generational divides and increasing potential for the detrimental effects of social isolation and loneliness. It appears that intergenerational relationships outside the family do not occur naturally. Intergenerational contact zones allow people of multiple generations ‘to meet, interact, build relationships, and, if desired, work together to address issues of local concern’.

Dr. Webster illuminates the role of intergenerational contact zones “to help bring the generations together in neighborhoods. This means being purposeful and [creating these shared spaces by] by getting the input from all the generations using them.” Dr. Webster expands on the paradigm of intergenerational contact zones within the housing context, specifically for older persons, for whom segregation by age is a typical model. “However, he states, we see empirically that having a diversity of ties or a mix of friends and family in one’s social network is really important for the long-term health and well-being of older adults. [In housing design], we need to move beyond age-segregated models to create flexible housing situations that allow the housing environment of an older adult to meet their needs, but at the same time provide opportunity for intergenerational contacts.”

An example of a multigenerational contact zone approach applied purposely with recorded success can be found in the Kampong Admiralty in Singapore, highlighted by Dr. Leng Leng Thang. This multigenerational “village” includes housing for families, older persons, shopping centers, gardens/parks/playgrounds as well as specialized medical support all under one roof. The development of this project is reinforced and incentivized

by government policies which recognize the role of family and quality intergenerational relationships to promote social capital, economic productivity, and health across the life course.

Box 4: Best Practice Example

Multigenerational housing facilitates kinship across generations (Singapore)

The Housing and Development Board, the public housing agency in Singapore plays a crucial role in encouraging and enabling close proximity or co-residence between the generations through various housing incentive schemes. Currently, >80% of the Singaporean population lives in public housing. The state benefits from close living between generations and provides various housing incentives, in the form of cash grants and/or priority allocation for applicants who wish to live together or near their married children/parents. The proximity housing grant, Married Child Priority Scheme, began giving first priority residence benefiting married children/parents to live together or close to each other. In, 2018, with changing demographics and family structure, the proximity housing grant further expanded to include singles who purchase resale flats near their parents.

In 2018, the first public housing ‘retirement village,’ Kampong Admiralty (village) Admiralty was created. This co-living community includes a medical center, wheelchair accessible supermarket, bank and food court, a child care center, active aging hub, senior care center (including dementia care), a playground, community park, and garden all in one location. This is a retirement village that is actually an intergeneration contact zone, where all families live together.

Urban design solutions such as Kampong Admiralty, reinforce intergenerational bonding among families and recognize that the support grandparents provide is paramount in enabling young couples to balance career and family while benefiting the development of the grandchildren. The principles and values children absorb from the older generation in early childhood tend to strengthen their sense of identity. Studies also show that grandchildren who were cared for by their grandparents when young tend to feel closer with the older generations, contributing to fostering closer intergenerational bonding in societies.

In addition to the social, health, and economic benefits, multigenerational communities such as Kampong Admiralty are also green solutions. Multigenerational households carry a significantly lower carbon footprint than their mono-generational counterparts.



Photo courtesy of: Dr. Leng Leng Thang
Source: Image obtained from Janice Heng and Grace Chua, 'Modern kampung' to launch in July BTO', The Straits Times, April 27, 2014. Original source from HDB.

Housing and multigenerational living as a green solution in climate change discussions

Increasingly, global policy makers, academics, and civil society representatives are recognizing the role of climate change on the well-being of our societies. Between 2030 and 2050, climate change is expected to cause approximately 250,000 additional deaths per year.²³ Families and communities are increasingly facing adverse consequences of global climate change including the detrimental impacts of accelerating extreme weather events.²⁴ As a pressing societal issue, climate change has received attention as a source of intergenerational tension,²⁵ however, promising examples highlight the benefit of identifying and implementing novel climate change solutions that unite generations rather than pitting them against one another.²⁶ As the key to mitigating greenhouse gas emissions, the household energy consumption sector plays an important role in global sustainable development. Recent research on multigenerational families in China has illustrated climate benefits from co-habitation.²⁷

Multigenerational families of 3-5 people or families with a large proportion of middle-aged and older people present the optimal structure from the perspective of reducing household energy consumption.²⁸ These “green” benefits of multigenerational cohabitation have similarly been corroborated in communities in Australia²⁹ and the United States.³⁰ Increasing numbers of families are turning to multigenerational living solutions; a 2021 Harris Poll conducted on behalf of Generations United estimated 26% of Americans are living in a multigenerational household.³¹ Although the initial impetus to co-habitat may have stemmed from financial or care needs which arose during the COVID-19 pandemic (57% of families surveyed in the US moved into multigenerational homes), many plan to continue doing so in the long-term (72% of families surveyed in the US).³² Benefits cited by families include access to caregiving, enhancing bonds between family members, and improved finances.³³ More research and evaluation is needed to assess the full extent and potential of multigenerational living on climate change, however these promising preliminary data are adding to an increasingly growing list of multigenerational housing benefits including economic stability, physical, cognitive and emotional wellbeing, and social cohesion.³⁴

“It’s less about family OR non-family, but more about family AND non-family together. If we focus on encouraging and fostering intergenerational relations within communities and among non-family members, this might have a positive ripple effect on grandfamilies because they’re embedded in these communities. If [grandfamilies] are embedded in communities where the norm is intergenerational relations, they will hopefully also receive more help and support from the community when caring for their grandchildren.”

- Dr. Noah Webster

Role of older persons in supporting communities and families

Much of the conversation is placed on global demographic shifts placing a need on more paid and unpaid care to support older persons as they age, with relevant and important recommendations made.³⁵ However, globally, older persons also provide direct financial and social contributions to the development and care of children. Globally, older persons provide significant contributions to family, community, and childcare. Sarah Harper, Professor of Gerontology at the University of Oxford and the Director of the Oxford Institute of Population Ageing summarized the contribution of older persons in support of families and communities.³⁶

Older adults also free up the time of younger people from household responsibilities, enabling them to undertake paid labor. A recent study of community work in Asia found that more than a quarter of Indians and Taiwanese and a fifth of Filipino and Chinese men and women in their 60s and 70s regularly helped in the wider community, providing assistance to individuals of all ages. Older adults can also be the mainstay of many families and households – providing financial assistance, care, and support to all generations – yet this is rarely recognized. Evidence from Latin America reveals that where older people live in multigenerational households, old age benefits are shared with other family members, while in Asia grandparents may transfer financial assistance directly to their grandchildren³⁷.

Many older men and women are primary caregivers for many children and grandchildren. This has become particularly significant as poverty, migration and the loss of the middle-adult generation due to HIV have changed family structures and resources across developing countries. Far from being a burden on the local community, these older people are providing care and struggling to provide the necessary food, shelter, and emotional support to younger generations and their extended families.³⁸

BOX 5: Lived Experience Expert Voices

Promoting interdependence across generations by addressing mental health supports

Victoria Gray, a Generations United GRAND Voice from the state of Arizona, and her husband have raised seven grandchildren, some of whom have significant mental and developmental disabilities. She amplifies the need for diverse representation of lived experience experts in policy design, including age diversity, and to focus on the intersection of family caregiving and mental health. We “need to change cookie-cutter programs.” [We are seeing] grandparents coming in at age 35. [We are seeing that more] counseling is needed. We need more mental health support [for grandfamilies]. Mental health is health and is needed for grandparents to address where they are.”



Photo courtesy of: Victoria Gray, Generations United GRAND Voice

Youth Kinship Leaders, Abby Nelson and Terrance Owens, both raised by their grandparents recognized the crucial role programs that coordinated “guidance and support [for their] transition in adulthood” played in their lives, also acknowledging the inequity in access to programs like “Youth Villages” which supported them.

Abby, who was raised by grandparents, one of whom later became ill, highlights the need to support grandchildren who may need to step into care support roles. We need to offer “support for grandparents who are aging and may be ill or grandchildren who end up being caregivers to their grandparents.” Terrance, raised by his grandmother, speaks passionately about the need to address the physical and mental health of grandparents raising grandchildren: “Grandparents are just as likely if not more likely to face burnout and we need to face this in policy discussions.” Abby also implores policy makers to consider the loopholes in physical and mental health support which overlook grandchildren in kinship care, many of whom may have experienced abuse or neglect. “Children who have experienced abuse or neglect are likely to have higher mental health and physical health needs but are placed on state insurance which may not meet these needs.”

A best practice example of programs and subsequent policy proposals that support the role of contributions of older persons to families and communities can be found in examining the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network: A National Technical Assistance Center in the United States, presented by director Ana Beltran.

In 2021, the American Rescue Plan Act included funding to develop the first ever national technical assistance center on grandfamilies and kinship families³⁹. This new center, coordinated by Generations United, focuses on supporting state and tribal government systems and NGOs, and elevating promising state practices and programs, ensuring families receive more and better support. Social scientist, Noah Webster extends the understanding of the Convoy Model of Social Relations and the impact of family and peer relationships on wellbeing and social cohesion to the benefits of lived-experience driven support systems and networks, like the Grandfamily & Kinship Network. “We need to acknowledge the role of peer support, and hearing from others that are going through similar situations, as we hear from lived-experience experts who are grandparents raising grandchildren, can be incredibly impactful. The role of those non-family relationships with their peers can have a very profound influence on their health and well-being. We need to make access to these peer support resources for grandfamilies more widespread so people who are newly coming into this role of a grandparent caring for a grandchild, have access to a support system and feel camaraderie with others who are going through this similar situation.”

“One lesson I have learned that I think will probably be transferable to all governments and systems around the world is to trust families.”

- Ana Beltran, Director of the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network, Generations United

Program director for Child Well-being at the Doris Duke Foundation and former acting assistant secretary and principal deputy assistant secretary for the Administration for Children and Families of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and leading child welfare policy specialist, Ms. JooYeun Chang emphasizes the shift needed in policy, practice, and infrastructure focusing prevention and proactive supports for families. Taking a life course approach to supporting families is crucial as existing systems are not designed to meet a families' wellbeing needs. Instead of systems that respond to the earliest sign of distress, existing systems respond to distress only after it has escalated to crisis. And as we build a system that support families, it is essential that we create programs and policies that recognize families come in different shapes and forms. We need to create programs and policies that address the needs of both non-traditional and nuclear families. For example, if grandparents are part of a family's support system, they should also be able to access services and support that promotes child and family well-being.

Ms. Chang continued by asking, "What are the basic social safety nets that promote intergenerational thriving? There is a need to have basic concrete needs met because we know that 7 million children are reported to the system [in the United States]. Nearly a million are found to be victims of abuse and neglect. The vast majority of those children and families are coming to our attention because of neglect, which we know is tied to poverty. We know what the challenges are and we aren't addressing them in policy." Ms. Chang emphasized the need to recognize the extent to which demographic shifts in global society because of environmental reasons, conflict, and mass migration and to question and improve policies to address the most vulnerable in our societies equitably.

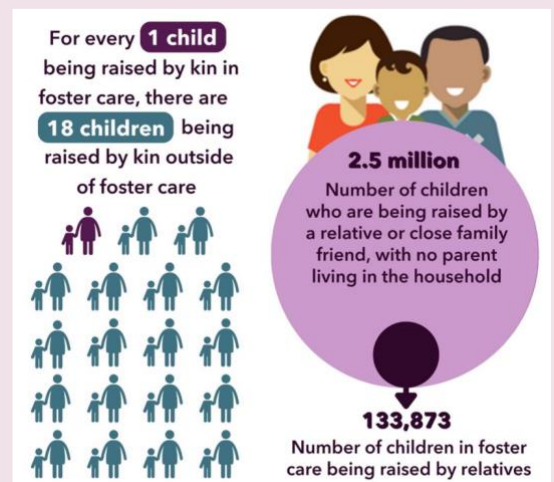
BOX 6: Best Practice Example Grandfamilies and Kinship Support Networks (United States)

Starting in the 1990s, states and communities across the United States began developing innovative programs known as "kinship navigator programs". These programs are designed to help caregivers connect with services and support for them and the children they raise. Research has shown these programs promote safety for caregivers and children, result in higher rates of obtaining legally permanent homes through guardianship and reunification with parents, and improved wellbeing of families.

A fundamental, overall strategy for creating responsive and supportive services at all levels of government and by NGOs is to include relative caregivers in the initial design and implementation of programs, policies, and services that impact them. This includes hiring and training them to provide services and support to their caregiver peers. Families with lived experience are experts in their own lives. They can be empowered and educated to take advantage of the best option that is available to them and are best able to provide insights on the impact of programs.

"...most people go to grandma's house and get spoiled but for me it was the only safe place I had...getting to live with grandma was like 'going to grandma's house' all the time. I had more love there than anywhere else in my life." - Chad Dingle, raised by his grandmother, Joan Dingle

Millions of young adults like Chad are thriving due to the care of their relatives. The love of family has supported these youth through the trauma of parental separation and has kept them connected to their roots.



Source: Generations United
<https://www.gu.org/resources/grandfamilies-strengths-and-challenges-fact-sheet/>

Role of lived experience experts at every stage of policy design

Crucial to creating responsive and supportive services targeting the needs of families, are collaborations between government, academia, civil society representatives (NGOs) as well as **lived experience experts** (relative caregivers, grandparents, children) **in the initial design and implementation of programs, policies, and services that impact them.**

Increasingly, best practices in global policy design and implementation are based not only on rigorous empirical processes but also on co-production alongside experiential knowledge by people of lived experience.⁴⁰ This symposium included contributions through a panel discussion of five lived experience experts, including four Generations United GRAND Voices (grandfamily caregivers) as well as two Generations United Young Kinship Leaders. Lived experience experts highlighted their awareness and frustration with the gaps in policies that overlook and at worst impede their ability to serve as family kinship caregivers, the collective community of resources they have created, which can serve as models for policy makers as well as the recognition “Nothing about us”, that they should be included at every step of policy from ideation, through design, implementation, and evaluation.

“What is so inspiring about hearing some of these positive stories [from lived experience experts] is that we can take them and try to spread inspirations into our normative practices and policies.”

- JooYeun Chang, Program Director for Child Well-being,
Doris Duke Foundation

BOX 7: Lived Experience Experts are vital at every stage of policy design and implementation

All lived experience experts aligned on the recognition of the need for more co-design with policy makers on programs that serve their needs. Nothing about us, without us was spoken emphatically. Keith Lowhorne, a Generations United GRAND Voice from Alabama is raising five grandchildren with his wife. He states: “Lived experience is where it is at. We need to empower more people. In an essence, we are an expert. We’ve walked the walk and we’ve talked the talk. But we need help.”

AnnaMarie White adds on: “The Cherokee have a saying “we do it until when”. We come alongside our granddaughter. This is an ongoing relationship. We are not going to be done when they are 18. Children don’t come in pieces; they are a family.”



Photo courtesy of: Keith Lowhorne, Generations United GRAND Voice

Recommendations

1

Take a multi-generational life course perspective in public policy is vital to address changing global demographics. This approach would entail valuing the strengths of each generation and supporting their interdependence.

As global demographics increasingly reflect “beanpole” families, wherein multiple generations are living at the same time, policies designed to support families necessitate a review of family, aging, and child policy through an all-ages lens. Policies that support children/youth, older adults, and families should not be seen as competing, but rather as mutually supportive and reinforcing. For example, one-third of social security payments support younger people and serve as an economic support for younger and older generations and families alike. Protecting existing programs with proven track records of success (e.g., social security, income tax credits) is key. Reviewing existing policies with an intergenerational lens will strengthen cohesion between generations, by addressing barriers and revising policies that hinder multigenerational engagement in housing, urban planning, age-related services, health, and caregiving. Evaluating and assessing promising examples of family friendly and multigenerational policies and programs across countries to identify common infrastructures that unite them to determine translatable and scalable best practices is also vital as is including lived-experience experts to provide insight on translation of programs and policies to reflect global cultural diversity.

2

Expand social insurance and supports for families. Interdependence across generations is indicative of a thriving society.

Solutions such as tax credits for parents and grandparents raising children and grandchildren recognize the vital role they play in the development of future members of global societies. Expanding policies that ameliorate interdependence is crucial. Develop responsive systems within family policies that prevent crises and efficiently and swiftly address the earliest signs of distress at all stages. Highlight the role of older persons within family and society. Increase awareness of the crucial role of grandparents in the family structure and the value that older individuals bring to society as a whole.

3

As changing demographics are resulting in changing families, recognizing the growing global role of nontraditional families, policies and programs should be inclusive and support nontraditional families equitably.

Many factors can prevent parents from being able to raise their children, leading to the formation of grand-families – families in which the grandparents and other relatives raise children. In the US, 8 million children across the US live in households headed by grandparents or other relatives, amounting to saving US taxpayers more than 4 billion dollars a year by keeping children and youth out of the government funded foster care system. In sub-Saharan Africa, as a consequence of the global HIV/AIDS epidemic around 13.7 million children are estimated to have lost one or both of their parents to AIDS-related causes, with grandparents stepping in to raise them. In many families, grandparents serve as conveyers of pro-social elder-friendly norms to grandchildren. Principles and values that children absorb from the older generation in early childhood tend to strengthen their sense of identity. Grandchildren who were cared for by their grandparents when young tend

to feel closer to their grandparents, contributing towards the fostering of closer intergenerational bonding across segments of society.

4

Celebrate diversity in global communities.

One solution will not work for all communities. Invite and support cooperation and collaboration with lived experience experts from diverse societies and subgroups to identify key issues, recognize existing solutions, evaluate effective approaches derived from other communities, and build novel policies and programs. Develop culturally responsive and adaptive solutions through collaborative research and design. Include people with lived experience in the initial design and implementation of programs, policies, and services that impact them.

5

Prioritize inclusion of underrepresented voices in every stage of policy design.

Include multigenerational representatives in research, evaluation and design of programs and policies. When youth and older persons are actively participating and influencing all levels of the decision-making process, they move from the periphery to being integrated in policymaking and programs. Investing in and strengthening inclusion of underrepresented voices like philanthropy and multigenerational lived-experience experts alongside other civil society representatives to evaluate, design and implement new policies results in efficient and innovative solutions grounded in lived experience and resulting in higher impact and uptake.

6

Promote multigenerational housing options and community planning to facilitate kinship across generations.

Evidence indicates the vast benefits of intentional contact between generations on health, well-being, productivity, and economic security. Policies that support and incentivize multigenerational contact, including in urban design, should be encouraged, ensuring that people of multiple generations meet, interact, build relationships, and work together to address issues of local concern. **Create flexible housing options that encourage older and younger generations to live in proximity**, for example, housing designs that allow for redesign and adjustment to meet age-specific preferences and needs. When implementing intergenerational residences and contact zones, ensure personnel at all levels receive adequate training to address the unique needs and strengths of each generation as well as apply evidence informed best practices in intergenerational approaches. Ensuring relevant staff training and logistics issues are incorporated into intergenerational design will maximize impact and sustainability.

7

Encourage more design and evaluation of multigenerational housing as green solutions.

In addition to economic, health, and social benefits, preliminary evidence indicates that multigenerational living offers ameliorative benefits to climate change. Multigenerational households carry a significantly lower carbon footprint than their mono-generational counterparts as well as on a per capita have been linked with the use of few resources (e.g., water, food). More data is needed to evaluate this evidence and determine best

practices in promoting energy efficiency and green solutions from multigenerational living and policies that support them.

8

Mobilize multigenerational campaigns to address social change, including tackling global challenges like climate change and promotion of health education and habits across generations.

Address the role that intergenerational cooperation plays in evaluating the impact of and co-designing solutions to existing paradigm shifts and current crises, including globalization, climate crises, conflict, displacement/migration, and global pandemics/epidemics including drug addiction, COVID-19, and isolation. Encourage an intergenerational approach to addressing these crises, including climate change and anxiety towards the future, as common and pressing problems that could benefit from older and younger generations working together. Multigenerational campaigns that incorporate the perspectives and strengths of all generations will maximize impact and relevance across the life course.

9

Increase data to provide long-term tools for coordinating, analyzing, planning, and monitoring family policies designed across the life course.

Incorporate a longitudinal approach to data collection to evaluate the impact of policies addressing childhood and youth on health, economic security and well-being into adulthood and older age. Evaluate trans-generational costs and benefits of policies.

Conclusions:

Our societies have changed since the policies currently being implemented to support families were designed. Governments across the globe, even in high income countries are not prepared to address the changing demographics. Drawing on best practices from around the globe, collaborating with regional lived-experience experts, and infusing an intergenerational lens to review and design new family policies will ensure that current and future generations will continue to survive and thrive.

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About Generations United:

For more than three decades, Generations United’s mission has been to improve the lives of children, youth, and older adults through intergenerational collaboration, public policies, and programs for the enduring benefit of all. We are the catalyst for policies and practices stimulating cooperation and collaboration among generations, evoking the vibrancy, energy, and sheer productivity that result when people of all ages come together. We believe that we can only be successful in the face of our complex future if generational diversity is regarded as an asset and fully leveraged.

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