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Vienna NGO Committee on the Family

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Dear Readers of 'Families International',

This 119th issue of 'Families International' takes a look back at the last International Forum in May 2021 by including the presenter Mary Kenny's and her colleague Aniko Nemeth's paper on the status quo of nutrition-related matters in Europe and Central Asia. The most prominent issues in this region, which, among others, are addressed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), are overweight and obesity, on the one hand, and anaemia in children and women, on the other hand.

Not only is the [Sustainable Development Goal 2](#) – to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture – dealt with in FI No. 119. The [Sustainable Development Goal 5](#) – to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls – is also discussed in three texts by UNICEF and the World Bank.

Furthermore, two member organisations of the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family have contributed to this issue: The International Federation for Family Development (IFFD) focuses on the impact of digital technologies on families, while Make Mothers Matter (MMM) informs about their current activities, particularly concerning women's (unpaid) care work as well as Afghan girls' right to education.

Finally, FI No. 119 is completed by a list of recent and upcoming events.

Sincerely,

Isabella Nening, M.A.
Executive Editor

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From the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family

**Status of Food and Nutrition in Europe and Central Asia
Challenges and actions**

Mary Kenny

Food Safety and Consumer Protection Officer, FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, Budapest, Hungary.

Aniko Nemeth

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The presentation highlighted a regional perspective of Europe and Central Asia on food security, nutrition and food systems, where there are still pockets of malnutrition, micronutrient deficiency and a growing epidemic of obesity. An update on the status, and some of the causes and potential solutions, including the role of people – women, men, families and communities was also discussed.

Poor diets are a major contributory factor to the rising prevalence of malnutrition in all its forms and diet-related non-communicable diseases, and the way food is produced and consumed is taking a toll on the environment and natural resource base. While the food and agriculture sector has performed impressively across the Europe and Central Asia region (ECA-region) during recent decades, there is growing evidence globally and in the ECA-region that the sector's performance needs to improve to overcome multiple challenges related to food insecurity and malnutrition; to provide access to affordable, safe and nutritious food; and to minimize environmental costs. The food systems approach is considered essential to responding to these issues.

FAO was founded in 1945 as one of the first UN organizations with a main goal to end hunger. In order to achieve this, FAO supports governments and development agencies to coordinate their activities to improve and develop agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and land and water resources. It has 197 members and around 150 offices worldwide. One of the five regional offices, the Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, is located in Budapest, Hungary. Our multidisciplinary technical team supports 18 low and middle income “program countries” in the region, on various technical areas including food safety, nutrition, animal health, plant production, climate change and rural development, etc. Our priorities in the region are the (1) empowerment of smallholders and family farms, (2) transforming food systems, and (3) the sustainable management of natural resources.

1. The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020

Five years into the 2030 Agenda, it is time to assess progress and to question whether continuing efforts implemented thus far will allow countries to reach SDG 2 targets to “end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture”. The number of people affected by hunger globally has been slowly on the rise since 2014. Current estimates are that nearly 690 million people are hungry, or 8.9 percent of the world population – up by 10 million people in one year and by nearly 60 million in five years.

The majority of the world's undernourished – 381 million – are still found in Asia. More than 250 million live in Africa, where the number of undernourished people is growing faster than in any other region of the world.

The number of people affected by severe food insecurity, which is another measure that approximates hunger, also shows an upward trend. In 2019, close to 750 million – or nearly one in ten people in the world – were exposed to severe levels of food insecurity. Considering the total affected by moderate or severe levels of food insecurity, an estimated 2 billion people in the world did not have regular access to safe, nutritious and sufficient food in 2019.

The **Prevalence of Undernourishment (PoU)** is FAO's traditional indicator used to monitor hunger at the global and regional level and is based on country data on food availability, food consumption and energy needs. It estimates the adequacy of a population's dietary energy intake. **The prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in the population, based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES)** is an estimate of the percentage of a country's population that faces difficulties in accessing enough safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and an active and healthy life. The data is collected through direct interviews by asking people about experiences associated with constrained access to food. The FIES is capable of providing measures of food insecurity at the individual or household level and at different levels of severity. Estimates can be compared across countries and sub-populations within countries. Rather than only national trends, this methodology can be used to highlight the "who" and "where" of food insecurity, answering the questions: which populations are the most food insecure, and where are they located? It supports the development of policies and programs to leave no one behind.

2. Regional Nutritional Issues in Europe and Central Asia

Undernourishment, reflecting the inadequacy of food energy, is hardly an issue at the national level in the ECA-region, with a prevalence of 5 percent or more in just six countries. However, other forms of food insecurity and malnutrition continue to be prominent – notably, **access to quality and nutritious foods, overweight and obesity, and micronutrient deficiencies**. The prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity (SDG Indicator 2.1.2) remains relatively high in many countries, averaging 15.8 percent in 2016-2018 in the Western Balkans; between 11 and 19 percent in countries in the European Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Caucasus and Central Asia; and 6.7 percent in the European Union. This indicator reflects concerns over access to – and consumer choice of – quality, nutritious and sufficient food.

Overweight and obesity is a major issue in this region. The prevalence of adult obesity in 2016 was higher than the world average of 13.2 percent in 49 of the 50 countries of the ECA-region for which data was available, and more than twice the world average in 14 countries. Moreover, the prevalence of adult obesity was higher in 2016 than in 2010 in all 50 countries.

Anaemia in both children and women is a public health concern across the region. In 2016, anaemia among women of reproductive age was specifically high in the Caucasus, Central Asia and Western Balkans and Turkey (with prevalence in the 30-34 percent range), but also relatively high in the European CIS (23.4 percent) and the European Union and European Free Trade Association (EFTA) subregions (17.2 to 18.7 percent range).

Please note that it was not available at the time of the presentation, but the most up-to-date information on food security and nutrition are included in the regional report: Europe and Central Asia Regional Overview of the State of Food Security and Nutrition 2020 (<http://www.fao.org/3/cb3849en/cb3849en.pdf>) that was published in collaboration with FAO, WFP, UNECE, UNICEF, WHO and WMO.

In order to overcome these challenges, FAO focusses on food-based approaches to improve nutrition. FAO's objective is to support countries to ensure the availability of diverse, culturally adequate, healthy diets for all.

3. What is a healthy diet?

According to WHO, a healthy diet protects against malnutrition in all its forms, as well as non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as diabetes, heart disease, stroke and cancer. It contains a balanced, diverse and appropriate selection of foods eaten over a period of time. A healthy diet ensures that a person's needs for macronutrients (proteins, fats and carbohydrates including dietary fibre) and essential micronutrients (vitamins and minerals) are met, specific to their gender, age, physical activity level and physiological state.

While the exact make-up of a healthy diet varies depending on these individual characteristics, as well as cultural context, locally available foods and dietary customs, the basic principles of what constitutes a healthy diet are the same.

National food based dietary guidelines provide science-based advice on foods, food groups and dietary patterns. They are intended to establish a basis for public food and nutrition, health and agricultural policies and nutrition education programmes.

4. Actions and Entry Points to Overcome Challenges

The current consumption patterns are usually far from dietary recommendations, even in high-income countries. Therefore, FAO supports its member countries to address these challenges. The main areas of work include: nutrition-sensitive agriculture, sustainable food systems, mainstreaming food security and nutrition across sectors, promoting comprehensive school feeding and other nutrition-sensitive social protection programs, increasing evidence and data on food supply, developing tools for food system analysis, and promoting the urban food agenda.

The Regional Office supports its member countries through collecting and analyzing food security and nutrition related statistics, conducting country case studies, supporting the development of national food-based dietary guidelines and developing the capacities of regional institutes.

One regional FAO project focuses on enhancing analytical evidence on diet and nutrition challenges from food systems perspectives in response to COVID-19. Supporting the development of national food-based dietary guidelines is also a priority. Another project focusses on capacity building on food literacy in Turkey and the development of a national policy document on food literacy.

Examples of nutrition-sensitive social protection pilot programs in the region include the social protection program (conditional cash transfers) combined with agricultural and nutrition skills development in Kyrgyzstan, and school food and nutrition education programs in several countries. School food and nutrition education programs are recognized as an important entry point to improve food and nutrition knowledge, skills and practices that provide the possibility to reach out to families and local communities. There are several excellent FAO resources for school children, teachers, and policy makers to engage all stakeholders.

A number of countries are taking action to tackle food loss and waste through the formulation of **national food loss and waste reduction strategies** (e.g. Belgium, France, Portugal, Spain, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Poland etc.); the development of measurement methodology and good practice guidelines for food business operators; and the revision of legislation and promotion of voluntary agreements between the public and private sectors. Furthermore, in Kyrgyzstan, FAO is working with multiple stakeholders to conduct a **systematic situational analysis** of pathways of cause and effect between trends in various dimensions of **food systems** (food supply, consumption, environment) and health outcomes, such as overweight, obesity and diet-related NCDs.

5. Sustainable Food Systems

Food systems, as defined by FAO, “encompass the entire range of activities involved in the production, processing, marketing, consumption and disposal of goods that originate from agriculture, forestry or fisheries, including the inputs needed and the outputs generated at each of these steps.” (HLPE, 2017) Food systems also include people and institutions as well as the sociopolitical, economic and technological environment in which these activities take place. A sustainable food system extends the scope of a policy outcome to address all three dimensions of sustainability, defined broadly as economic, social and environmental. This means that the outcome of a policy intervention should: i) be profitable throughout (economic sustainability); ii) generate broad-based benefits for society (social sustainability); and iii) have a positive or neutral impact on the natural environment (environmental sustainability) (HLPE, 2017). Thus, achieving a sustainable food system is a progressive process of identifying and striking a balance among the food and agriculture sector’s economic, social and environmental objectives.

The CFS Voluntary guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition (VGFSyN) present a number of recommendations with a comprehensive, systemic, and science- and evidence-based approach to achieving healthy diets through sustainable food systems. The objective of the VGFSyN is to contribute to the process towards achieving sustainable food systems and improved nutrition, recalling that transformation of food systems should be encouraged in a coherent manner, as appropriate and in accordance with and dependent on national contexts and capacities, in accordance with the three dimensions of sustainable development.

Many countries in the ECA-region need to improve several elements of their food systems, including production (both quantity and quality of raw materials), address land reform and the viability of small farms, improve technologies and efficiencies along value chains, strengthen policies to support farmers and stabilize food market prices, strengthen systems to prevent and manage food chain risks, minimize food loss and waste, and focus on local markets and export trade. As these elements are strengthened, adopting a systemic approach to build in sustainability means that each country would need to decide on the trade-offs, according to their situations and goals, and build on existing opportunities.

The Member Countries confirmed their commitment to improve food systems during the Ministerial Roundtable discussion at the FAO Regional Conference for Europe and Central Asia (3-4 November, 2020). They recognized the importance of better coordination across sectors and the promotion of dialogue and policy coherence. Stressed the need to invest in data collection for evidence- and science-based policy-making. Also emphasized that in the context of social sustainability and leaving no one behind, it is necessary to address inequalities in food systems, foster a more people-centered approach, and empower vulnerable and marginalized groups, in order to provide affordable, healthy diets for all.

At the global level, the upcoming UN Food System Summit 2021 brought food systems to the spotlight of the international development agenda. The preparations for the Summit include the organization of Food Systems Dialogues on the global, regional and national levels. In order to provide a framework for the discussions, five Action Tracks were defined, to explore the following topics: (1) ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all, (2) shift to sustainable consumption patterns, (3) boost nature positive production at sufficient scale, (4) advance equitable livelihoods, (5) build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress.

6. Cost and affordability of healthy diets

The cost of a healthy diet can act as the main barrier to food access for many individuals. The most conservative estimate shows that healthy diets are unaffordable for more than 3 billion people in the world (Global SOFI 2020). The report analyzed the affordability of three types of diets: energy sufficient, nutrition adequate and healthy diets.

An **energy sufficient diet** provides adequate calories for energy balance for work each day. This is achieved using only the basic starchy staple for a given country (e.g. maize, wheat or rice only). A **nutrient adequate diet** not only provides adequate calories (per the energy sufficient diet above), but also relevant nutrient intake values of 23 macro- and micronutrients through a balanced mix of carbohydrates, protein, fat, essential vitamins and minerals within the upper and lower bounds needed to prevent deficiencies and avoid toxicity. A **healthy diet** provides adequate calories and nutrients (per the energy sufficient and nutrient adequate diets above), but also includes a more *diverse intake of foods from several different food groups*.

Healthy diets are estimated to be, on average, **five times more expensive** than diets that meet only dietary energy needs through a starchy staple. These two measures – cost and affordability – are country-specific and need to be established in each situation to discuss the feasibility of adopting or promoting healthy diets.

In addition, all diets have hidden costs, which must be understood to identify trade-offs and synergies in relation to other SDGs. The two most critical hidden costs are related to the health (SDG 3) and environmental (SDG 13) consequences of our dietary choices and the food systems that support these. According to the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020 report (Global SOFI 2020), under current food consumption patterns, diet-related health costs linked to mortality and non-communicable diseases are projected to exceed USD 1.3 trillion per year by 2030. On the other hand, the diet-related social cost of greenhouse gas emissions associated with current dietary patterns is estimated to be more than USD 1.7 trillion per year by 2030. Shifting to healthy diets can contribute to reducing health and climate-change costs by 2030, because the hidden costs of these healthy diets are lower compared to those of current consumption patterns. The adoption of healthy diets is projected to lead to a reduction of up to 97 percent in direct and indirect health costs and 41–74 percent in the social cost of GHG emissions in 2030.

There are several policy options to **reduce the cost and enhance affordability of healthy diets**, including avoiding the taxation of nutritious food, investment in nutrition-sensitive agricultural production, the promotion of urban and peri-urban agriculture, nutrition-sensitive social protection programs and supporting nutrition education. In order to offset the current pressure on agricultural and food production and increase affordability of healthy diets, food and agricultural policies and incentives must help accelerate productivity and **production of nutrient-dense food**, such as vegetables and fruits, and protein-rich foods. Importantly, some estimates suggest that increased agricultural productivity alone will help raise incomes of nearly 80 percent of the world's extreme poor who live in rural areas, most of whom rely on farming for their livelihoods.

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From UNICEF

Innocenti Research Brief

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unicef
Office of Research-Innocenti

Ujana Salama: Cash Plus Model on Youth Well-Being and Safe, Healthy Transitions – Midline Findings

INTRODUCTION

Tanzania's pilot Cash Plus Model on Youth Well-being and Safe, Healthy Transitions, or "Ujana Salama" ('Safe Youth' in Swahili), aims to improve the lives of young people in rural areas. These adolescents are extremely poor and face multiple health and economic risks.

Implemented by the Tanzania Social Action Fund (TASAF) and operated within the Government's Productive Social Safety Net (PSSN), the programme targets adolescents in households already receiving the PSSN (comprised of cash transfers, public works and livelihoods' enhancement). Technical assistance is provided by UNICEF Tanzania and the Tanzania Commission for AIDS (TACAIDS).

Social protection, such as cash transfers, is increasingly recognized as an important tool to invest in adolescents and ensure they become healthier, more productive adults. Investing in adolescents has important implications for poverty reduction and economic growth, especially when combined with other investments, such as infrastructure and job growth.

Ujana Salama is motivated by evidence that cash transfers can positively influence youth well-being.¹ However, in isolation, cash is rarely sufficient to overcome the interrelated risks adolescents face.²

The [baseline report](#) shows youth in PSSN households face myriad challenges—such as school dropout, early pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, violence, abuse and exploitation—despite government support. Lack of economic opportunities further hinders adolescents' safe transition to adulthood.

To address this, Ujana Salama leverages the impacts of the PSSN with complementary programming, including training and linkages to services to address adolescents' unique vulnerabilities. The goal is to facilitate safe, healthy and productive transitions to adulthood while strengthening local government capacity and services related to adolescent health, livelihoods and social protection. The combination of cash transfers with complementary programming and linkages to services is called integrated social protection or cash plus.



PSSN cash transfer beneficiary, youth and enumerator, Tanzania Adolescent Cash Plus midline data collection, Mufindi council.

¹ Handa, S., et al., 'The government of Kenya's cash transfer program reduces the risk of sexual debut among young people age 15-25', PLoS One, vol. 9, no. 1, 2014. Heinrich, C. J., Hoddinott, J. and Samson, M., 'Reducing adolescent risky behaviors in a high-risk context: The effects of unconditional cash transfers in South Africa', Economic development and cultural change, vol. 65, no. 4, 2017, pp. 619-652.

² Watson, C. and Palermo, T., Options for a "Cash Plus" Intervention to Enhance Adolescent Well-being in Tanzania: An introduction and review of the evidence from different programme models in Eastern and Southern Africa, UNICEF, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 2016.

UJANA SALAMA: THE CASH PLUS PROGRAMME

Layered on top of the PSSN, Ujana Salama has three elements:

1. Training on livelihoods and sexual and reproductive health (SRH)-HIV life skills;
2. Mentoring (on livelihood options and life concerns) and productive grants to be used for schooling, vocational or business plans;
3. Strengthening health facilities and linkages to youth-friendly services for HIV, SRH and violence response.

Two TASAF Project Authority Areas (PAAs) were chosen to implement Ujana Salama, based on overlaps between TASAF priorities and regions in which UNICEF was supporting existing programmes.³ These PAAs cover four councils in Southern Tanzania: Mufindi and Mafinga in Iringa region; Rungwe and Busokelo in Mbeya region.

In-person livelihoods and SRH training was delivered over 12 weeks between January and May 2018. Facilitators met with youth groups in each village for two to four hours a week. Livelihoods and SRH/HIV training occurred jointly in each session (one to two hours for each), covering the topics listed in Box 1.

Post-training coaching and mentoring continued for ten months. During this time, adolescents who had attended trainings and developed a plan (either for a business or to continue education/vocational training) received a grant equivalent to US\$80 (in one or two tranches, for the schooling/vocational or business plan, respectively).

EVALUATION

To understand the effectiveness of this programme, an impact evaluation is being led by UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti and EDI Global in collaboration with TASAF, TACAIDS and UNICEF Tanzania.⁴ The evaluation uses a cluster Randomized Controlled Trial design, whereby 130 clusters (villages) were randomized into

Box 1: Training topics

LIVELIHOODS

- Dreams and goals
- Entrepreneurship skills
- Business plans and record-keeping
- Savings

HIV & SRH

- Coping with puberty
- Relationships
- HIV knowledge, prevention, and protection
- Sexual risk taking and protection
- Pregnancy and family planning
- Violence and gender-based violence
- Addressing negative gender attitudes and norms
- Alcohol and drugs
- Healthy living and nutrition

two study arms:

1. Intervention: Cash plus villages receiving the PSSN cash transfer combined with Ujana Salama;
2. Control: villages receiving the PSSN cash only.

The ongoing evaluation is a longitudinal, mixed methods study. Surveys were conducted with health facilities, communities, caregivers and adolescents at baseline (2017), midline (2018) and Round 3 (2019).⁵ The midline evaluation was done immediately after the in-person training but before the mentoring and productive grants.

Questionnaires ask about knowledge and aspirations that are expected to change in the short term as a result of the training, as well as mid- to long-term behavioural changes that are expected to occur after all the plus components are completed.

³ For administrative purposes, TASAF refers to geographic areas of programme implementation as Project Authority Areas (PAAs). On the mainland, these are the same as local government councils. Then, within PAAs there are wards, and within wards, villages/mtaas (a mtaa is an administrative unit in urban areas, equivalent to a village in rural areas).

⁴ The evaluation builds on and contributes to the [Transfer Project](#), a research and learning initiative of the UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, in collaboration with UNICEF Regional and Country Offices, national governments, and local research partners.

⁵ Randomization took place in 2017, after baseline implementation, and was stratified by PAA and village size (large vs. small villages).

Box 2: *Evaluation outcomes*

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES

- Educational and occupational aspirations
- Gender-equitable attitudes
- Knowledge of modern contraceptives
- Knowledge of HIV prevention
- Knowledge of where to seek SRH/HIV and violence response services

MID- TO LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

- Youth employment opportunities and income-generating initiatives
- Schooling and training attainment
- Increased ability to seek appropriate SRH/HIV and violence response services
- Delayed sexual debut, marriage and pregnancy
- Reduced engagement in exploitative sexual partnerships and HIV risk behaviours
- Improved mental health
- Reduced violence victimization

The baseline sample included 2,458 adolescents aged 14–19 years. Of these, 2,104 were re-interviewed at midline (86 per cent re-interview rate). The quantitative analysis findings are based on data from adolescents interviewed at both baseline and midline – the ‘panel sample’. The percentage lost to follow-up was similar in intervention and control villages. Baseline characteristics remained similar in both groups.

For the quantitative analysis, we used data from the panel sample of adolescents in intervention and control villages and compared changes over time between the two groups.⁶ For the qualitative analysis, we explored mechanisms and pathways for impacts through in-depth interviews with a subsample of 32 adolescents.

MIDLINE FINDINGS

We observe positive effects on some short-term outcomes, including SRH and HIV knowledge and gender-equitable attitudes. These findings underscore how, at this point in the intervention, adolescents may begin to gain new knowledge and to think about their

future in different ways. However, by midline, time participating in the programme was relatively short and other components had not yet been implemented. Other mid- and long-term outcomes, such as changes in behaviour and experiences, may take longer to materialize, which explains why we do not observe these impacts at this stage.

Schooling, economic participation and aspirations

- The programme increased youth participation in economic activities, driven mostly by increased livestock herding (for the household or youth starting their own herding activities). Adolescents view livestock herding as an intermediate step to gather resources to be invested in education or a new business later. Higher participation in livestock herding did not result in higher numbers of hours spent in economic activities overall.
- Youth engagement in household chores was not affected, except for higher participation (and hours) in collecting firewood.
- The cash plus training was held outside schooling hours, so did not change school attendance or dropout.
- The programme did not affect educational aspirations.
- The programme increased the percentage of adolescents who want to become a business owner.

HIV, SRH and linkages to services

- The programme increased HIV prevention knowledge among females but not males. The programme increased girls’ knowledge that sex with one uninfected monogamous partner can reduce HIV risk. As males generally have higher HIV and SRH knowledge, our results show that the programme is helping girls to catch up.
- Baseline values of other HIV knowledge (whether mosquitoes or food transmit HIV) were high (over 90 per cent) and so there was little room for improvement. There were no impacts on these indicators or on knowledge that regular condom use reduces HIV risk.

6 We use an Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) specification, where we control for the baseline value of the considered outcome.

- Knowledge of modern contraceptive methods increased, again driven by the female sample. Moreover, youth had higher awareness of contraception and condoms (stronger impacts seen among girls).
- There was no increase in the number of adolescents seeking SRH or HIV testing, services or treatment. However, among those seeking services, there was a shift in the services sought: programme participants were more likely to seek prevention services and less likely to seek pregnancy care, compared to adolescents in the control group.
- Health services are more adolescent friendly, although no impact was observed on the topics discussed or the perceived quality of services.
- No impacts were found on partnership or sexual behaviour, including partnership formation; sexual debut and characteristics of first sex; contraceptive use; transactional sex; or perceived HIV risk or testing.

Gender equity, violence reduction, mental health and attitudes

- Gender-equitable attitudes increased among males (but not females), particularly on violence and domestic chores.
- By midline, there was no impact on adolescents' experience of emotional, physical or sexual violence.
- There were no impacts on reports of depressive symptoms or self-perceived stress.
- There was no effect on life satisfaction, self-esteem, locus of control, entrepreneurial drive or perceived social support.

CONCLUSIONS

Ujana Salama aims to leverage the impacts of cash by providing youth with training on livelihoods and SRH/HIV, mentoring and productive grants, and linkages to adolescent-friendly SRH/HIV services.

Findings from the midline study showed positive impacts on HIV and SRH knowledge, increased gender-equitable attitudes, and increased aspirations to run a business.

However, adolescents must translate these newly acquired aspirations and knowledge into practice. As these changes may take longer to materialize, we may see impacts on behaviours (contraceptive use, risky behaviour, visits to health facilities, economic initiatives) and experiences (violence and exploitation, early pregnancy, marriage) when considering all programme components.

This study provides insights into the effectiveness of a cash plus intervention implemented within an existing government-run social protection programme, and improves understanding of how cash plus can help young people safely transition to adulthood in Tanzania, sub-Saharan Africa and globally.

About this UNICEF Research Brief

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For more information on the programme and midline findings, see the [full report](#): Tanzania Adolescent Cash Plus Evaluation Team, A Cash Plus Model for Safe Transitions to a Healthy and Productive Adulthood: Midline Report, UNICEF Office of Research—Innocenti, Florence, 2020.

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For every child, answers



Gender and Safety Nets— Priorities for Building Back Better¹

ALESSANDRA HEINEMANN AND
KATHLEEN BEEGLE

06/2021

INTRODUCTION

Achieving gender equality and economic inclusion is critical for economic growth and prosperity. The pandemic threatens to reverse hard-won gains towards gender equality. Before the crisis, women were more likely than men to be engaged in vulnerable forms of work in low- and middle-income countries, were overrepresented in sectors with the largest economic disruptions, and carried the brunt of increased care work. During the crisis, their income opportunities have taken a big hit. In Ethiopia, for example, women respondents to a phone survey conducted during the early stages of the pandemic were found to be more likely than men respondents to have lost their jobs (15 percent versus 12 percent) (Ambel et al. 2020). In Latin America, women workers were 44 percent more likely than men workers to lose their jobs at the onset of the COVID-19 crisis. Woman-led microbusinesses, in the hospitality industry, and in countries more severely affected by the COVID-19 shock were disproportionately affected compared with corresponding businesses led by men (Torres et al. 2021). Women and older girls also bear a disproportionate share of the care responsibilities arising because of school closures among family members affected by COVID-19. Reports of gender-based violence have increased around the world.

THE CRITICAL ROLE OF SAFETY NETS

A large body of evidence has established that safety nets are an effective tool in the fight against poverty.² They boost household consumption, build resilience, increase human capital, and promote productive inclusion. Safety nets have emerged as the primary policy tool for mitigating the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic crisis and now cover more than 1.3 billion new beneficiaries. Virtually all countries and territories have introduced social protection measures—more than 1,400—in response to COVID-19; social assistance accounts for more than 60 percent of the response (Gentilini, Almenfi, and Dale 2020). The majority of cash transfer programs are new and temporary.

Existing programs have expanded vertically, meaning they are topping up payments and introducing extra payment cycles for existing beneficiaries who were receiving benefits pre-COVID. They have also expanded horizontally, adding new beneficiaries that were previously not covered. Informal sector workers are one of the groups targeted with this expansion, and millions have been reached by cash-based programs, many of which are temporary (Gentilini 2020).

Given tightening government budgets, it is critical that safety nets be designed for optimal impact. The prolonged nature of the pandemic is stretching government resources around the world. While evidence demonstrates that cash transfers and other programs have the potential to close gender gaps and empower women, few programs deliberately set out to do so. Traditionally, many large-scale cash transfer programs do not engage women intentionally beyond their roles as mothers and caregivers. Maximizing the potential of cash transfers to support an inclusive and sustained recovery requires a strategic approach to address gender inequality and the gender differentiated impacts of this crisis.

The recommendations below take into account the difficult fiscal pressures facing many governments, not merely those brought on by this crisis, but also those that existed leading up to the crisis (in terms of the unsustainable public debt crisis that was looming). New approaches to domestic resource mobilization, efficiency in spending, and new technologies are all part of the broader picture to create sustainable financing for safety nets.³

¹ The authors are thankful to Loli Arribas-Baños, Ugo Gentilini, Margaret E. Grosh, Caren Grown, and Yuko Okamura for their valuable comments and suggestions.

² This note focuses on social safety nets—also sometimes known as social assistance programs. These are defined as noncontributory benefits provided either in cash or in kind that are intended to support the poor and the vulnerable (households and individuals particularly exposed to idiosyncratic and covariate risks and lacking sufficient coping mechanisms or resources to mitigate the impacts). They are a component of larger social protection systems that also include contributory social insurance, such as pensions and health insurance, as well as labor market policies and programs.

³ See the discussion in Chapter 5 of Beegle et al. 2018.

FOCUS AREAS TO MAXIMIZE SAFETY NET INVESTMENTS AND BUILD BACK BETTER

Four priorities among governments and stakeholders are highlighted here to build stronger safety net systems that are inclusive of both men and women. Strengthening safety nets to address gender inequality does not necessarily mean specifically targeting women or making women the primary recipients of the payments. Greater coverage and stronger, more adaptive delivery systems in general can have a disproportionate impact on gender equality outcomes.

Maintain and extend coverage among vulnerable groups, prioritizing women and taking the specific needs of women into account

Since the onset of the pandemic, safety net coverage has increased significantly. In several countries, schemes have extended coverage to informal sector workers, such as street vendors, market sellers, and waste-pickers—occupations in which women are overrepresented. For example, Brazil introduced an emergency cash transfer of R\$600 (US\$107) for adults without formal jobs who live in households with a per capita income below half the minimum wage. Single mothers and woman heads of household receive double the benefit. Similarly, Togo's Novissi scheme supports all informal workers whose incomes have been disrupted by the pandemic, providing higher benefits to women to meet basic needs (about 20 percent higher relative to men). Some countries have forged innovative partnerships with associations of informal sector workers or women's groups to reach and enroll large numbers of new beneficiaries quickly. In the Indian state of Bihar, for example, self-help groups have been critical in reaching vulnerable women during the COVID-19 response.

The most recent data available suggest that, prepandemic, close to 80 percent of the population in low-income countries lacked any social protection coverage.⁴ In lower-middle-income and middle-income countries, the share stood at around 40 percent. To ensure a robust recovery, social protection systems, of which safety nets are one part, need to cover not only the poorest, but also other excluded populations, until economic activity resumes and people can rebuild their livelihoods. Schemes should consider differentiated benefits for groups that are particularly vulnerable.

Invest in adaptive delivery systems that recognize women and girls' specific vulnerabilities

The pandemic has also highlighted the value and importance of investments in adaptive delivery systems for safety nets. For example, those countries relying on social registries that included people beyond the poorest were able to extend the safety net quickly to the previously uncovered. In lieu of an existing registry, some countries resorted to alternative data sources to identify beneficiaries. For example, Morocco was able to tap an existing

health sector database (Ramed) to reach 3 million informal workers. El Salvador used electricity consumption as a proxy to select households for a grant of US\$300 (those with electricity consumption at less than 250 kilowatt-hours). Other approaches for identifying beneficiaries have included a combination of satellite imagery and mobile phone data in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zimbabwe.

Rethinking social registries from a gender perspective can improve the ability to identify vulnerable individuals more accurately. It is well known that risks do not affect women and men, girls and boys equally and that the ability of people to cope with shocks varies. Moreover, vulnerabilities are often multiple and interlinked. Current social registries often rely on data collected through household surveys, which, because of the effort involved, can only be updated periodically. As countries invest in the expansion of social registries, they should explore links with more dynamic data that allow for the identification of gender-specific vulnerabilities. This would enable the design of better targeted responses in future crises, whether economic, climate, or health related.

In addition to investments in social registries, adaptive delivery systems require robust case management and referrals systems. Resources should be expanded to support social workers in referring beneficiaries to other available services in addition to social assistance. This includes social services such as health and education, mental health, parenting programs, as well as productive economic opportunity programs (trainings, extension agents, etc.).

And underpinning these areas is the need for foundational identification systems for fast, efficient crisis response. Identification is often a precondition to accessing safety nets and other services. Yet, as many as 45 percent of women in low-income countries do not have access to foundational IDs, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia.⁵ Policy barriers, that make it difficult for women to access ID cards, apply for passports, or register the birth of children, remains. Some countries require permission from a male guardian or documentation not required of men, making it more burdensome for a woman than a man to obtain an ID or the foundational documents needed to get one. Other constraints, such as mobility restrictions, care burdens, the inability to use or access information and communication technology (ICT), and lack of agency, compound the gender gap in ID access.

Leverage digital technologies to reach and empower women in safety net programs

Cash transfers that are delivered digitally offer tremendous potential to close the gender gaps in financial inclusion (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation et al. 2020). Direct payments create a gateway to savings, credit, and other financial services provided that payments go hand in hand with training among those with low levels of financial and digital literacy. Depositing payments directly into women's accounts can increase women's control over funds and improve safety. If payments are made through mobile

⁴ See statistics at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/data/datatopics/aspire>

⁵ See more statistics at <https://id4d.worldbank.org/global-dataset>

money, women need to own, control, and have the digital literacy to use a mobile phone. Payments delivered through mobile money can potentially be bundled with information and services that are also delivered digitally, enabling scale at low cost.

Safety net programs and digital technologies can be leveraged to close gender gaps in financial inclusion and mobile phone ownership. A women's empowerment cash transfer program in Zambia, for example, provided women with a choice of payment providers, thereby maximizing convenience and accessibility, while also promoting competition among service providers. Crucially, it also provided phones to those women who did not own one and supplied extensive financial literacy training to enhance budget management and encourage saving.

Invest in cash plus approaches to tackle multiple gender gaps simultaneously

Cash plus approaches, whereby safety net payments are combined with information and complementary services, have been shown to deliver on various dimensions of women's empowerment. One promising set of cash plus interventions are those focused on economic inclusion. They bundle cash transfers with other features, such as assets, training and coaching, to ensure beneficiaries can build livelihoods and break out of poverty traps. A recent survey of economic inclusion programs found that the vast majority of participants are women and that a significant share of programs had design features that were explicitly aimed at empowering women by increasing their control over resources and agency (Andrews et al. 2021). Some of these programs seek to address multiple constraints at once, including broader contextual factors, such as engaging with communities to challenge harmful social norms. Increasingly, productive inclusion programs are being implemented at scale through government structures, as in the Sahel region (Archibald, Bossuroy, and Premand 2021). Investment and experimentation can push this model to close the gaps in women's entrepreneurship and labor force participation.

Realizing the potential that social protection holds for women and girls in the context of COVID-19 requires deliberate experimentation, measurement, and learning. In particular, there is promising evidence that cash transfers can reduce gender-based violence. For example, a randomized control trial in Bangladesh found that, if cash or food transfers are provided with behavior change communication on nutrition, a decrease in intimate partner violence was sustained four years after the intervention had ended (Roy et al. 2018). These findings are particularly relevant given the reports of increased violence against women as a result of lockdowns, reduced mobility, economic stress on households, and disruptions in access to services. Schemes should systematically explore design variations and measure impact across a range of outcome areas, so it will be possible to learn, scale the most effective approaches, and go beyond cash.

CONCLUSION

Over the last decade, safety net programs have expanded in low- and middle-income countries. There is a large and growing body of evidence showing that these programs are effective at improving the socioeconomic well-being of poor households. It is probably not an understatement to say that such programs are a main pillar in the policy response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As these programs grow in scope and size, they can become powerful tools in addressing gender inequality and empowering women and girls. This brief outlines four broad entry points to consider toward that goal. The sustainable financing of this ambitious agenda is critical because investments in safety nets should not occur at the expense of or compromise other critical areas of service delivery.

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LACGIL
Gender Innovation Lab

Improving Gender Wage Equality Reduces Intimate Partner Violence in Brazil: Policy Implications for Mothers

WORLD BANK

Gender Innovation Lab for Latin America and the Caribbean (LACGIL)^a

POLICY BRIEF: May 2021

Highlights

- More wage equality for women reduces violence against women in urban Brazil
- Evidence shows that violence has declined at various levels of severity
- Wage equality may be improved through family-friendly policies such as preschool provision and maternity leave
- Public safety and legal protections are also needed

Intimate partner violence in Brazil

After two back-to-back attempts on her life, one of which left her partially paralyzed, Maria da Penha Fernandes sought legal protection against her husband. It took 19 years, and then he was sentenced to a mere two years in prison. Appalled by the process, Maria da Penha became an advocate for fresh legislation and enhanced services to help women who have suffered violence by their partners. The 2006 Maria da Penha Law, named in honor of her, established mechanisms to prevent domestic violence through reforms in the legal system that should make it easier for women experiencing intimate partner violence (IPV) and other domestic violence to be successful in pressing charges against their abusers.

Though there has been some progress, violence against women remains commonplace in Brazil. At 4.8 deaths per 100,000 women, Brazil had the fifth highest female murder rate in the world in 2013.¹ The rate of female homicides has not declined since then. Women's police stations, which expanded as a result of the law, have helped prevent female homicides in locations where they were implemented.² Yet more widespread changes are needed to confront violence against women.

^a This note was prepared by Sarah Anne Reynolds, School of Public Health, University of California, Berkeley.



Gender Innovation Lab for Latin America and the Caribbean (LACGIL)

The LACGIL supports impact evaluations and inferential studies to find out what works to close gender gaps in human capital, economic participation, social norms, and agency.

Additionally, the Lab disseminates findings to improve operations and policy making in the design of cost-effective interventions that tackle gender inequalities and drive change.

To accomplish this, the LACGIL works in partnership with World Bank units, aid agencies and donors, governments, nongovernmental organizations, private sector firms, and researchers.

IMPROVING GENDER WAGE EQUALITY REDUCES INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Elizaveta Perova, Sarah Reynolds, and Ian Schmutte use municipal data on urban Brazil to test if economic empowerment can help protect women.^b They find that homicide rates of women ages 15–49 are lower if the wage equality gap is reduced in favor of women. This is especially the case in poorer municipalities, which have higher rates of homicide. This is a promising finding. More wage equality may help reduce homicides among those who need protection the most.

Additionally, the authors find that more wage equality in favor of women is associated with less nonfatal violence on younger women (ages 15–30). This age-group includes many mothers of young children. Impoverished mothers are often financially dependent on their spouses, especially if they must stay home and care for children. An increase in income can allow these women to leave abusive partners. Or, even better, the partner will become less abusive because the threat that his partner will leave has become credible.

This policy brief reviews several Brazilian policies that can help contribute to gender wage equality to benefit young, impoverished mothers and women in general. These policies are generally intended to improve child development or the labor market participation of mothers, but implementation can also benefit wage equality and thus may reduce IPV.

WHY IS THERE GENDER WAGE INEQUALITY? UNDERSTANDING THE MOTHERHOOD PENALTY

In Brazil, women are better educated than men on average. Brazil also has a relatively high female labor force participation rate. However, in Brazil, as in most of the world, women are still paid less than men. Much of the wage gap is driven by an unequal distribution of caregiving responsibilities. Often referred to as the motherhood penalty, this leads to the following:

- **Productivity differences because of employment gaps.** The skills of women who exit the labor market do not grow as much as the skills of women who continue to work. When mothers return to work after a child-rearing hiatus, their wages are lower than the wages they would be receiving if they had not stopped working.
- **Selection into flexible work.** Women may choose jobs that allow them to engage in childcare while their children are young. These are often part-time positions or informal sector work at flexible hours. In Brazil, the informal sector is more egalitarian in wages, but does not pay as well as the formal sector.³
- **Discrimination against women.** Employers may prefer to hire men over women to avoid pregnancy among their workers. If the differences in skills and job selection are accounted for, there is still a 17 percent wage difference between men and women in Brazil.⁴



© Photo: Yosef Hadar / World Bank

^b Does the Gender Wage Gap Influence Intimate Partner Violence in Brazil? Evidence from Administrative Health Data.

POLICIES TO OFFSET THE MOTHERHOOD PENALTY AND IMPROVE WAGE EQUALITY

Brazil's 120-day (3-month) maternity leave requires that employers guarantee women's employment and salary following childbirth. Research on the database of formal sector contracts indicates that maternity leave does provide work stability around childbirth. But three years after the birth, almost half the mothers who had been employed at the time of the birth were no longer formally employed.⁵ This suggests that childcare remains a challenge for working mothers.^c Extending the maternity leave may help mothers resolve this issue.

Maternity leave policies are only enforceable in the formal sector; many poor women will not benefit from this program. The rural maternity stipend is a lump-sum transfer provided to impoverished rural women upon pregnancy. Unlike the smaller monthly *Bolsa Família* transfer (family allowance) that is often used to purchase household durables, the sizable maternity stipend is typically used to purchase income-generating assets such as cattle and fields, which men would normally control.^{d 6} Expanding the coverage of the stipend to urban women in the informal sector may stimulate similar investments among self-employed mothers.

The Constitution of Brazil establishes the right to public childcare, but supply is limited. Two studies explore the impact of the provision of childcare on maternal labor supply in Brazil's largest cities, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.^{7 8} Both find that maternal employment increases. The São Paulo study also finds that some mothers who had worked in the informal sector switched to the formal sector after they were provided with childcare. This demonstrates that childcare provision improves women's workforce participation not only through employment, but also by allowing them to obtain more stable jobs that also likely pay better. Childcare provision should be incorporated into local plans for economic development and poverty reduction.

Not all women who take advantage of childcare begin working. Whether or not they are employed, women still take on the lion's share of domestic work. Thus, in low-income settings, the low wages may not be sufficient to entice women to take on additional work outside the household, particularly if their domestic chores are unaided through domestic appliances. The creation of more and better jobs for women, such as entrepreneurship programs, should be supplied in tandem with childcare.

Programs are needed to encourage gender equality within the home and to ease tensions around women taking on the provider role. Promundo originated as a Brazilian organization working to reduce gender violence through initiatives, such as reconceptualizing fatherhood and redefining masculinity, so that violence and control are removed from gender norms. The program has been shown to be successful in reducing family violence in several locations around the globe.⁹ Strategically timing their interventions with the reentry of mothers into the workforce could help couples navigate changes in resources and responsibilities.

GENDER WAGE EQUALITY NEEDS TO BE ACCOMPANIED BY POLICE PROTECTION TO REDUCE INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Pro-family policies will not completely resolve wage inequality or eliminate IPV. The results of the wage equality and IPV study^e of Elizaveta Perova, Sarah Reynolds, and Ian Schmutte differed in municipalities with and without women's police stations. These specialized police stations were initially established because many women felt their complaints were not being taken seriously by traditional police offices. Because of the Maria da Penha Law, even more women's police stations were implemented across the country. Brazil now has over 400 women's police stations to provide women with specialized services to address crimes against them. In addition to emergency response, they refer women to social services. Some stations even undertake employment assistance.

In municipalities with women's police stations, improved wage equality led to a reduction in medically registered incidents of violence against women. In municipalities without women's police stations, the opposite occurred: medically registered incidents of violence rose with more equality. This suggests that pro-women institutions are needed to validate women's gains in the labor market.



© Photo: Guilherme Stecanella, Avenida Paulista, Brazil. Published on March 7, 2018

^c There is also evidence that mothers of young children (ages 0-2) prefer to care for their children themselves, perhaps because childcare for younger children is often more expensive, and it can be difficult to evaluate quality since young children cannot report back on the day's events.

^d The size of the transfer is not the only mechanism that pushes women to purchase assets. Because there is a lot of uncertainty around when the transfer will arrive, women cannot use it to access credit, and the transfer itself is perceived as a large, high-risk asset. This leads women to do mental accounting with the transfer in the asset category rather than among household expenditures.

^e [Does the Gender Wage Gap Influence Intimate Partner Violence in Brazil? Evidence from Administrative Health Data.](#)

CONCLUSION

Wage equality reduces violence against women at various levels of severity, especially among poor, young women in urban Brazil. These women have children at earlier ages and have more children than average. Active policies to protect them against the motherhood penalty are needed. Policies such as maternity leave, the maternity stipend, and childcare can support mothers in the workforce and improve wage equality. Civil and legal policies—such

as the policies established by the Maria da Penha Law—must also accompany these economic policies to promote women's equality. Directly addressing work discrimination and familial cultural norms will help push these policies more quickly toward the realization of equality.



Measuring intimate partner violence (IPV)

IPV can occur at various levels of physical severity. From a slap to murder, all are classified as IPV. Measuring violence against women is difficult because much of the violence occurs at home. If the aggression is sufficiently severe physically, however, the incidents can be documented within the health care system. Few health reports indicate the perpetrator, but, because the most common perpetrators of violence against women are intimate male partners or male ex-partners, measures of the frequency of women's health visits for violent injury can be a good proxy for IPV even if perpetrators are not specified.¹⁰

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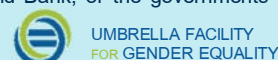
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A more tech-driven and challenging world

What the 'New Normal' will be like in 2025 for families

1 May 2021



The expert predictions reported here about the impact of the Internet over the next ten years came in response to one of eight questions asked by the Pew Research Center Internet Project and Elon University's Imagining the Internet Center in an online canvassing conducted between November 25, 2013, and January 13, 2014. For this project, they invited more than 12,000 experts and members of the interested public to share their opinions on the likely future of the Internet and 2,551 responded to at least one of the questions we asked.

The Web-based instrument was fielded to three audiences. The first was a list of targeted experts identified and accumulated by Pew Research and Elon University during the five previous rounds of this study, as well as those identified across 12 years of studying the Internet realm during its formative years. The second wave of solicitation was targeted to prominent listservs of Internet analysts, including lists titled: Association of Internet Researchers, Internet Rights and Principles, Liberation Technology, American Political Science Association, Cybertelecom, and the Communication and Information Technologies section of the American Sociological Association. The third audience was the mailing list of the Pew Research Center Internet Project. While most people who responded live in North America, people from across the world were invited to participate.

When pandemics sweep through societies, they upend critical structures, such as health systems and medical treatments, economic life, socioeconomic class structures and race relations, fundamental institutional arrangements, communities and everyday family life.

A new canvassing of experts in technology, communications and social change by Pew Research Center and Elon University's Imagining the Internet Center finds that many expect similar impacts to emerge from the COVID-19 outbreak.

In a nutshell, they say the 'New Normal' in 2025 will be far more tech-driven, presenting more big challenges.

*Extract of Pew Research Center, February 18, 2021.
"Experts Say the 'New Normal' in 2025 Will Be Far More Tech-Driven, Presenting More Big Challenges."*

Available at <https://pewrsr.ch/3vp7b7Z>

Outline accompanying tables

Emerging change: As the global pandemic unfolds, experts predict people will develop greater reliance on swiftly evolving digital tools for good and for ill by 2025

The pandemic proves that world-upending phenomena can emerge from anywhere. The turn to living and working more intensively within digital communications networks shows the value of these complex systems. The pandemic brings more focus on both the upsides and the downsides of digital life.

- Tele-everything is embraced: The broad adoption of “remote” processes – tele-work, telemedicine, virtual schooling, e-commerce and more – is growing. In 2025, there will be more people working from home, more virtual social and entertainment interactions and fewer forays in public than has been in the case in recent years.
- Humans’ yearning for convenience and safety fuels reliance on digital tools: The pandemic has rearranged incentives so that consumers will be more willing to seek out smart gadgets, apps and systems. This will speed up adoption of new education and learning platforms, rearrange work patterns and workplaces, change family life and upend living arrangements and community structures.
- The best and worst of human nature are amplified: The crisis is enhancing digital interconnectedness that engenders empathy, better awareness of the ills facing humanity and positive public action. On the flip side, some individuals, cities and nation-states will become more insular and competitive as survival mode kicks in. Xenophobia, bigotry and closed communities will also increase.

Worries: As the global pandemic unfolds, experts fear growing social and racial inequality, worsening security and privacy and the further spread of misinformation

The advantaged enjoy more advantages; the disadvantaged fall further behind. Concerns particularly focus on the growing power of technology firms. Many suggested solutions have a double-edged quality because they threaten civil liberties. Automation could take many humans out of the work equation.

A plurality of experts think sweeping societal change will make life worse for most people as greater inequality, rising authoritarianism and rampant misinformation take hold in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak. Still, a portion believe life will be better in a ‘tele-everything’ world where work-places, health care and social activity improve

Asked to consider what life will be like in 2025 in the wake of the outbreak of the global pandemic and other crises in 2020, some 915 innovators, developers, business and policy leaders, researchers and activists responded. Their broad and nearly universal view is that people’s relationship with technology will deepen as larger segments of the population come to rely more on digital connections for work, education, health care, daily commercial transactions and essential social interactions. A number describe this as a “tele-everything” world.

Notable shares of these respondents foresee significant change that will:

- worsen economic inequality as those who are highly connected and the tech-savvy pull further ahead of those who have less access to digital tools and less training or aptitude for exploiting them and as technological change eliminates some jobs;
- enhance the power of big technology firms as they exploit their market advantages and mechanisms such as artificial intelligence (AI) in ways that seem likely to further erode the privacy and autonomy of their users;
- multiply the spread of misinformation as authoritarians and polarized populations wage warring information campaigns with their foes. Many respondents said their deepest worry is over the seemingly unstoppable manipulation of public perception, emotion and action via online disinformation – lies and hate speech deliberately weaponized in order to propagate destructive biases and fears. They worry about significant damage to social stability and cohesion and the reduced likelihood of rational deliberation and evidence-based policymaking.

At the same time, a portion of these experts express hope that changes spawned by the pandemic will make things better for significant portions of the population because of changes that:

- inaugurate new reforms aimed at racial justice and social equity as critiques of current economic arrangements – and capitalism itself – gain support and policymaker attention;
- enhance the quality of life for many families and workers as more flexible-workplace

arrangements become permanent and communities adjust to them;

- produce technology enhancements in virtual and augmented reality and AI that allow people to live smarter, safer and more productive lives, enabled in many cases by "smart systems" in such key areas as health care, education and community living.

These six themes were commonly expressed by these experts in their responses to a question that asked them to consider the changes that were set in motion in 2020 by the COVID-19 outbreak and describe what the "new normal" might look like in 2025.

Some 47% of these respondents said life will be mostly worse for most people in 2025 than it was before the pandemic, while 39% said life will be mostly better for most people in 2025 than it was pre-pandemic. Another 14% said most people's lives in 2025 will not be much different from the way things would have turned out if there had been no pandemic.

Among the 86% who said the pandemic will bring about some kind of change, most said they expect that the evolution of digital life will continue to feature both positives and negatives. These expert views link in interesting ways with public attitudes. A Pew Research survey in August 2020 found that 51% of U.S. adults said they expected their lives to remain changed in major ways even after the pandemic is over.

This is a nonscientific canvassing, based on a non-random sample. The results represent only the opinions of the individuals who responded to the queries and are not projectable to any other population.

The bulk of this report covers these experts' written answers explaining their responses. They sounded many broad themes about the ways in which individuals and groups are adjusting in the face of the global crisis, describing the most likely opportunities and challenges emerging as humans accelerate their uses and applications of digital technologies in response. It is important to note that the responses were gathered in the summer of 2020, before the completion of the presidential election in the United States and before COVID-19 vaccines had been approved.

As these experts pondered what was happening in mid-2020 and the likely changes ahead, they used words like "inflection point," "punctuated equilibrium," "unthinkable scale," "exponential process," "massive disruption" and "unprecedented challenge." They wrote about changes that could reconfigure fundamental realities such as people's physical "presence" with others and people's conceptions of trust and truth.

And the spread of lies via social media and other digital platforms is likely to further damage all social, political and economic systems.

- Inequality and injustice are magnified: The pandemic and quick pivot to the use of digitally driven systems will widen racial and other divides and expand the ranks of the unemployed, uninsured and disenfranchised. Power imbalances between the advantaged and disadvantaged are being magnified by digital systems overseen by behemoth firms as they exploit big data and algorithmic decision-making that are often biased. More people will be pushed into a precarious existence that lacks predictability, economic security and wellness.
- As risk grows, security must also; privacy falls and authoritarianism rises: The health crisis spawned by the pandemic and broader dependence people have on the internet heighten threats of criminal activity, hacks and other attacks. Optimized security solutions may further reduce individuals' privacy and civil liberties. They are likely to expand mass surveillance, as authoritarian states will use this as an opportunity to silence dissent and abuse citizens' civil rights.
- Threats to work will intensify from automation, artificial intelligence, robotics and globalization: In order to survive, businesses are reconfiguring systems and processes to automate as many aspects as possible. While artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics will enhance some lives, they will damage others, as more work is taken over by machines. Employers may outsource labor to the lowest bidder globally. Employees may be asked to work for far less; they may have to shift to be gig and contract workers, supplying their own equipment, and they may be surveilled at home by employers.
- Misinformation will be rampant: Digital propaganda is unstoppable, and the rapidly expanding weaponization of cloud-based technologies divides the public, deteriorates social cohesion and threatens rational deliberation and evidence-based policymaking.
- People's mental health will be challenged: Digital life was already high-stress for some people prior to the

required social isolation brought on by the pandemic. The shift to tele-everything will be extensive and that will diminish in-person contact and constrict tech users' real-world support systems and their social connections.

Hopes: As the global pandemic unfolds, experts urge that calls for social justice be heeded and that technology design focus on human well-being

- Social justice will get priority: The reawakening of public movements for social justice and economic equality may create more-responsive government and sociopolitical systems that are more attuned to diversity, equity and inclusion. This includes a focus on closing digital divides.
- People's well-being will prevail over profit: Businesses may start to value serving the greater good above the typical goals of market capitalism. This could produce policies to fund broader safety nets such as universal health care, universal basic income and broadband as a basic utility. A reckoning for tech companies and their leaders might also occur.
- The quality of life will improve: The transition to home-based work will reduce urban air pollution, overcrowding and transportation gridlock. It will enhance the overall quality of life, create a better environment for family life, allow more accommodations for those with disabilities and inspire other enhancements.
- AI, VR, AR, ML will yield good: Artificial intelligence, virtual reality, augmented reality, deep learning, machine learning and natural language processing will make virtual spaces feel much more real, in-person, authentic and effective.
- Smarter systems will be created: Municipal, rural, state and independent services, especially in the health care sector, will be modernized to better handle future crises, quickly identifying and responding to emerging threats and sharing information with all citizens in timely and helpful ways.

They wondered, too, if humans can cope effectively with such far-reaching changes, given that they are required to function with "paleolithic emotions, medieval institutions and god-like technology," in the words of biologist E.O. Wilson.

Among the scores of changes they see is the emergence of: an "Internet of Medical Things" with sensors and devices that allow for new kinds of patient health monitoring; smart millimeter-wave machines to diagnose people with disease symptoms; advances in synthetic biology and computational virology that improve drug testing and targeted disease therapies; diagnostic screenings that cover a person's diet, genes and microbiome; handheld detection devices that citizen swarms use to address environmental problems; and a new class of telecare workers.

Additionally, these experts forecast the creation of 3-D social media systems that allow for richer human interaction (sometimes via hologram avatars); mediated digital agents (interdigital repetitive or time-consuming tasks; a "flying Internet of Things" as drones become more prolific in surveillance, exploration and delivery tasks; ubiquitous augmented reality; an expanded gig economy built around work-from-home free agents; urban farming that reaches industrial scale; advances in trusted cryptocurrency that enable greater numbers of peer-to-peer gradually taking over significantly more locally based, on-demand manufacturing; "local in spirit and local in practice" supply chains; a robust marketplace of education choices that allow students to create personalized schooling menus; "tele-justice" advances that allow courts to handle large numbers of cases remotely; "truth valuation" protocols that diminish the appeal of disinformation; and small, safer nuclear reactors for energy production.

At the more everyday level, these experts also think there will be better speech recognition, facial recognition (including sentiment discernment from facial expressions), real-time language translation, captioning and autocorrect capacity, sensory suits, robust video search, body motion sensors, 3D glasses, multimedia databases and broader network bandwidth that will enable full 3D virtual experiences and developments in AI allowing it to serve more of people's needs.

The “anytime anywhere” connection

The impact of new technologies on families as a megatrend

1 July 2021



This increasing reliance on digital technologies has created intense pressures and opportunities for families. Digitization, for example, presents new threats to the financial security of many families by making them more vulnerable to surveillance and discrimination in the marketplace. At the same time, technologies are providing important connections, as families scattered across the globe stay connected and engage in “remote caregiving.”

Researchers, policymakers, popular pundits, and journalists often note that digital technologies have the power to disrupt personal relationships and deliver uninvited content. This anxiety centers on the impact that new technologies can have on the well-being of children and the strength and social cohesion of families. Child development experts worry that cell phones and personal computer devices—now common fixtures at the dinner table—distract parents from their children (and vice versa) and prevent them from engaging in positive, nurturing conversations.

The “anytime anywhere” access to Internet-enabled technologies has produced a thicket of benefits and dangers that families struggle to navigate. There are also great disparities in how families use technology, whether merely for entertainment or for social and educational betterment. The effects of new technology vary widely across socio-economic and other divides. Children from

Over the past forty years, information and communication technologies have transformed the way we work, the nature of learning and education, and the methods by which we achieve personal and collective goals. Parents, grandparents, children, and the range of loved ones who form part of the modern family today face new and challenging choices about technology use, access, and control. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown how much we can depend on the use of technologies and how they can affect our lives.

Consequently, the impact of New Technologies on families has been featured as one of the megatrends suggested by the United Nations for the preparations and celebration of the 30th Anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2024.

Extracted from 'Families and New Technologies' (International Federation for Family Development, 2021).

Available at: <https://familyperspective.org/focus-group-families-and-new-technologies/>

A family megatrend *

Megatrends, including new technologies, demographic shifts, rapid urbanization and migration trends, as well as climate change, have been dramatically shaping our world in recent years, impacting individuals and families. In preparation for the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, 2024 (IYF+30) the Division for Inclusive Social Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs aims to raise awareness of mega-trends and present research on their impacts on families.

The observances of the International Day of Families, 2021-2024 are to focus on each trend, starting with families and new technologies in 2021. The focus on megatrends is to facilitate the analysis of their impacts on family life and recommend responsive family-oriented policies to harness the positive aspects of those trends and counteract their negative facets.

The prolonged COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the importance of digital technologies for work, education and communication. The pandemic has accelerated technological changes that had already been under way both in society and at work, including the expanded use of digital platforms and related technological innovations like cloud computing and the use of big data and algorithms. As a result, innovative ways of working as well as flexibility for both employees and employers have been on the rise.

On the other hand, concerns have been raised over some negative impacts relating to technology such as 'screen fatigue' and cyber bullying. In addition, school closures and increased demand for working from home, exacerbated already growing concerns over rising levels of parental burnout which can be linked to long-term negative impacts on child well-being. 3 Now, more than ever, parents and caregivers, especially those engaged in full-time employment, need resources to successfully manage their parenting obligations. With the growing field of innovative technologies, new digital technologies have a potential to empower parents to meet such obligations successfully. In exploring the impact of new technologies on families, the observance of the International Day of Families will focus, in particular, on the current state and future potential of digital technologies in advancing parenting education.

* Background note of the United Nations 2021 observance of the International Day of Families.

low-income families, for example, spend more time with TV and videos than children from affluent families. There are also great disparities in how families use technology, whether for entertainment or for social and educational betterment. Parents in low-income families struggle to acquire digital literacy and often do not have easy access to teachers, librarians, mentors, and other educated professionals to help.

These technologies will continue to play an integral role in families' life choices and opportunities. Today, families have no choice but to use digital communication to interact with the many public institutions that no longer accept paper applications or other communications. Public assistance programs have increasingly become "smart," meaning participants are now more likely to interact with an algorithmically trained virtual assistant rather than a human caseworker.

Caregivers must also contend with digital systems in schools and elsewhere, as learning processes become computer-driven. In short, technology is becoming the primary medium through which people gather, do schoolwork, shop, apply for jobs, schedule child care, communicate with teachers, read to their children, share neighborhood news, and spread the word about family celebrations and hardships.

By organizing a focus group about this topic, we wanted to understand better all the different aspects of this topic, so that we can produce recommendations that can be validated by experts and confirmed by families and other global NGOs. To this end, we gathered a group of experts who are active in a variety of fields, so that their opinions could derive the central elements to our advocacy work.

We quote below some of the main inputs by them and the main recommendations that emerged from it.

1. Universal coverage of the internet

Access to the internet is a key driver for both economic and social change; digital tools have changed the way we live, teach, access public services, and do business, and have therefore become a prerequisite to access economic opportunities.

Pierre Verlyck, CEO, POP School, Paris, France.

2. Household's access to new technologies

There is a need for a more nuanced measurement of internet access, rather than simple statistics about access to broadband internet that can be misleading.

Jessica Navarro, Research Assistant, Human Development and Family Studies, University of North Carolina Greensboro, USA.

3. Teleworking and work-family balance

Technology is making work possible for a lot of families, not necessarily that are working from home, but allowing work from anywhere.

Tracey C. Burns, Senior Analyst, Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, OECD, Directorate for Education and Skills, Paris, France.

Analyzing work efficiency should be a question of output rather than hours, as studies have shown that when people can work from where and when they want, their output is much greater.

Janice Richardson, Insight – International advisor on Literacy, Rights & Democracy, Luxembourg.

4. Remote learning and education

Character education should be taken very seriously in distance education, because remote learning tends to become more transactional than transformative and transformative elements are what make us human, but it also makes us who the employers want to have to work for them.

Tom Harrison, Reader and Programme Director at the School of Education, University of Birmingham, Director of Education at the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, United Kingdom.

We now have more evidence that ICT tools do not automatically lead to better learning and underlined the importance that such tools be embedded in a relevant pedagogical approach and also about the importance of doing implementation research.

Matt Brossard, Chief, READ (Research on Education and Development) Unit, UNICEF, Office of Research – Innocenti, Florence, Italy

5. Policies to bridge intergenerational divide

Professionals across the board should develop digital skills and digital confidence as a content area for teaching, not just teachers and those working the children, but also those working with other ages.

Susan Walker, Associate Professor in Family Social Science, Founder of the Parentopia Project, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, USA.

6. Coding as a classroom subject

Human language is for human communication, thus coding does not qualify as a language and, although it is a good subject to study, we should rather prioritize teaching internet safety.

Luci Pfeiffer, Pediatrician, Doctor in Child and Adolescent Health, Psychoanalyst, Member of the SBP Working Group on Health in the Digital Age, Coordinator of DEDICA Program, Curitiba, Brazil.

7. Online child abuse prevention

Algorithms that promote interaction between kids and potential threats could be promoted by policymakers in coordination with industry, so that the onus is not left to the parents only but also the providers.

Amina Fazlullah, Equity Policy Counsel, Common Sense Media, Washington DC, USA.

A timely selection *

Recognizing that digital technology has transformed family life, the Division for Inclusive Social Development of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) identifies technological change for the family as one of four megatrends. Worldwide families continue to face challenges that threaten their food security, income, housing and safety, and by extension the growth and development of children in their care; challenges that today intersect and often depend on access to the internet. New technologies have become a necessity, yet present new challenges.

The COVID-19 pandemic has particularly brought attention to the influence of technology on family life, as it has meant for many the continuation of work, school and personal relationships when isolated. And it also exposed more violations to privacy and safety, enriched societal and political divisions, and widened inequalities.

Digital technology has embraced the attention of professionals who work with families as both a means for the delivery of service (such as family therapy or parenting education) and as a content focus (e.g., aiding parents in understanding children's privacy online or decision making on smart phone ownership). Yet can we assume that professionals are able to fully support families as they too navigate new devices and a virtual landscape?

The selection of New Technologies and Families as one of the themes guiding the preparations for the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, 2024 and the 2021 observance of the International Day of Families could not be more timely. Now is the time to understand these impacts and support families in ways that prepare them for a digital future. To do so will only further achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Quoting the former UN Secretary General from 2018, "the achievement of [the sustainable] development goals depends on how well families are empowered to contribute to the achievement of those goals. Thus, policies focusing on the wellbeing of families are certain to benefit development" (p.5).

* Susan K. Walker, 'Technology Use and Families: Implications for Work-Family Balance and Parenting Education', background paper of the United Nations 2021 observance of the International Day of Families.

Recommendations

1. Access to the internet should be a human right and the appropriate instruments should be implemented for it. States should work towards universal access through developing an underlying infrastructure, as well as helping citizens to gain access to appropriate devices, skills and protections, and encouraging everyone, particularly the most vulnerable or least privileged to partake in digital citizenship.
2. There is a consensus on the need for more qualitative measurement of access, rather than broad general figures that can be misleading. Policymakers must understand the gaps in connectivity, infrastructure, but also other gaps in training for families, students, teachers. For a better understanding, figures on access to the internet should be broken down as follows:
 - The proportion of households with functional internet access and the underlying infrastructure.
 - The proportion of households with a computer.
 - The number of devices per person in the family.
 - Family composition and demographics (number of children and parents, age, type of work, caregivers...).
 - The type of skills and attitudes family members hold.
 - The kind of technology children and teenagers use, and the corollary threats.
3. Policymakers should support login / log-out digital workplace policies to encourage a healthy work/family balance and promote clear schedules in telework environments.
4. Policymakers should encourage all employers to provide recommendations and resources on the benefits and the risks of teleworking.
5. Policymakers should develop and encourage a right to teleworking solutions for people who would not be able to work otherwise.
6. Policymakers should adopt a holistic approach when considering the experience and needs of all the various partakers in education, like children, parents, caregivers, teachers, institutions.
7. Policymakers should initiate the process of a holistic transformation of school teachings into an online environment, including the development of different pedagogies, and build education systems that enable children to learn both in schools and online equally.
8. In online learning settings, educational professionals should both help children to be able to develop interpersonal skills, innovate ways of assessing their students' socioemotional health, and promote access to mental health and counseling services when necessary.
9. Policymakers and educational professionals should work together to build digital learning platforms working that can operate in low connectivity contexts to reduce the exacerbation of disparities across and within countries, and to think strategically about how to leverage internet access and technology to address issues of poverty and inequality.
10. Policymakers and educational professionals should promote digital technology as an opportunity for traditionally disenfranchised audiences (e.g., school dropouts and unemployed adults) to find meaningful work. Besides, they should work to develop training and support for the least digitally literate students and parents as a means to improve equity.
11. Policymakers should support digital training for all generations, and build mentorship schemes between young people, parents and older adults.
12. Policymakers should make it compulsory for digital platforms and websites to include protections and software to reduce bullying, blackmailing, and illegal content.
13. Educational professionals should incorporate developmentally appropriate content about digital skills (including content creation) and digital citizenship for children and adolescents of all ages.
14. Education and child-related professionals should promote open communication between parents and children about digital technology, including discussions about online risks and benefits. Further, they should encourage parents to engage with the platforms and media their children utilize as a means of understanding their children's digital lives.



MMM ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE MOTHERS' ROLE AND RIGHTS

MMM side-event to the UN High-level Political Forum (HLPF): Changing narratives about unpaid care work and the economy

The event was held on 14 July 2021 to discuss how changing the way unpaid care work is perceived and socially and economically valued is a first and necessary step to bring about systemic changes for more economic justice for women, especially mothers.

Our objectives:

- Raising awareness on the multiple benefits of taking a more holistic approach to “work”, i.e. considering both paid and unpaid care work by recognising that unpaid care is indispensable work that sustains the economy and develops valuable skills.
- Making the case for a paradigm shift in our economic narrative around care, so that in budgets, spending on care, education, health and family support are considered investments, not expenses to be minimised.
- Showcasing examples of good policies/practices that can change perspectives and views on unpaid care work and our economy.
- Calling on governments and international organisations to seize the opportunity to transform our economy and move from the short-term and exploitative “GDP growth” narrative to the “wellbeing economy” narrative.

Speakers:

- **Olivier De Schutter**, UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights (introduction)
- **Susan Himmelweit**, Feminist economist, Emeritus Professor of Economics, Open University, UK, member of the UK Women’s Budget Group Commission for a Gender-Equal Economy (moderator)
- **Gary Barker**, Founder and CEO, Promundo Global
- **Sonia Malaspina**, Director, Human Resources South Europe, Danone Specialized Nutrition
- **Anam Parvez Butt**, Gender Justice Research Lead and Policy Advisor, Oxfam Great Britain
- **Shahra Razavi**, Director, ILO Social Protection Department

The event’s full recording as well as a report with key take-aways and additional resources are available here: [Unpaid care work is work that our economic system must recognize, invest in and support](#)

MMM written statement to the UN HLPF: Revisiting SDG 8 with a “care lens”

In our written statement to the 2021 High-level Political Forum, we revisit SDG 8, which will be reviewed this year. We argue that work must be redefined as a holistic concept where both paid and unpaid work are combined. We also challenge the notion of “economic growth” as being a goal per se, and call instead for a repurposing of our economic system to serve the wellbeing of people and the planet.

Read our full statement on [Revisiting SDG 8 with a “care lens”](#).



MMM ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE MOTHERS' ROLE AND RIGHTS

MMM at the 109th International Labour Conference: Social protection for mothers and children is an investment

MMM's intervention stressed the critical importance, relevance, and legitimacy of realising universal social protection for unpaid caregivers, especially mothers.

The COVID-19 crisis has exposed how the inequitable distribution of care responsibilities is a source of economic injustice for women, creating challenges that most mothers face in trying to juggle care responsibilities with paid work.

As part of the “decent work” agenda, it is high time for governments and employers to address this issue and seriously invest in supporting women, parents and other caregivers doing this essential yet unpaid, mostly invisible work of caring.

First, unpaid care work must be recognised as work, essential work which, in the long term, benefits communities and society as a whole. It is therefore also a collective responsibility.

This means that every unpaid caregiver should have access to social protection just like any other worker. In particular, every mother should have access to social security, healthcare, pension and full maternity protection.

Furthermore, we need to redefine “work” as a holistic concept, where both paid and unpaid work are combined. The world of work must adapt to this reality, and private companies must commit to supporting workers with care responsibilities.

Second, social protection must be considered an investment, not an expense that should be minimised.

Supporting caregivers, especially parents, through targeted public services *and* adequate social protection is investing in people and families. Ultimately, it is also about investing in children – and we know how critical nurturing care is during early childhood. It is an investment with high returns, especially for vulnerable families.

The pandemic provides a unique opportunity for systemic changes, and this begins by changing narratives:

- 1) Unpaid family care work *is* work, and a collective responsibility, hence the need for universal social protection.
- 2) Social protection must be considered a long-term investment.

More on [Social protection for mothers and children is an investment](#)

MMM #RaiseAPen campaign passes important milestones at the European Parliament

Our campaign, aimed at supporting Afghan women's pressing request to a continued right to education, passed two important milestones at the European Parliament recently.

- 1) The EP adopted a [resolution](#), endorsing, amongst other key issues, that “European support will remain conditional on preserving and building upon the achievement of the past 20 years ... that girls' right to education, which is a great achievement of the last 20 years, should be undisputed”. The linkage to EU funds is crucial and has the potential to impact the future of millions of Afghan girls and women.



MMM ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE MOTHERS' ROLE AND RIGHTS

- 2) MEP Maria Arena hosted a meeting of the EP Subcommittee on Human Rights jointly with the Committee on Foreign Affairs and in association with the Delegation for relations with Afghanistan with the participation of prominent Afghan women, including Sima Samar, human rights advocate, former Minister of Women's Affairs, and former Chair of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, Fawzia Koofi, member of the Afghan Peace Negotiation Team, Shaharзад Akbar, Chairperson, Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), and Metra Mehran, young social entrepreneur and co-founder of the Feminine Perspectives Movement. One message resonated strongly: "Our fight is to use pens, our minds, and the strength of our words."

MMM thanks Josep Borrell, High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of EU Commission, who at the Plenary session, raised his pen in solidarity and said: "... the education of women is the basis of a civilised society ... when you educate a woman, you educate the family ... the multiplier effect for women in education is impressive. And when I see these young girls raising their pencils, I think all of us, we should raise our pencils and our engagement with Afghan people, and especially with the Afghan women." Here is our [video](#) that inspired these words.

On the occasion of that important debate at the EU parliament, Maria Arena, Chair of the EP Subcommittee on Human Rights, raised her own pen in solidarity with the campaign.

Our thanks also go to Petras Auštrevičius, Chair of the Delegation for relations with Afghanistan, who is supporting this campaign. These were highly symbolic #RaiseAPen moments. Our gratitude goes to them and to all MEPs who voiced their support for Afghan women and girls.

They are important steps in the right direction and should stimulate all of us to continue working together, ensuring that all girls in Afghanistan enjoy education, including higher education, without fear of life or persecution.

The #RaiseAPen initiative has always been about raising Afghan voices asking to secure this basic human right. It is our collective duty now to make certain they don't lose this right or the gains they have so courageously made in the last two decades.

More on the RaiseAPen Campaign under [#RaiseAPen, a Global Campaign for women and girls' Right to Education in Afghanistan](#)

Riseup-PPD statement for World Maternal Mental Health Day

The World Maternal Mental Health Day (MMH Day) 2021 is aimed at raising awareness surrounding maternal mental health issues worldwide.

The **Riseup-PPD**, a network that MMM is proud to partner with, is an EU-funded COST Action dedicated to promoting women's health in the peripartum period and to achieving a more standardised and unified approach in recognising, treating, and preventing peripartum depression (PPD). It is an international, interdisciplinary network that joined forces to bring about changes in the field of perinatal mental health.

Find more here: [Riseup-PPD statement for World Maternal Mental Health Day](#) with [their statement](#) marking World Maternal Mental Health Day



MMM ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE MOTHERS' ROLE AND RIGHTS

Recommendation on European Child Guarantee adopted

Make Mothers Matter welcomes the newly adopted [European Council Recommendation establishing a European Child Guarantee](#) that aims at reducing the number of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion within the European Union. The European Child Guarantee hopes to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and lift at least 5 million children out of destitution by 2030.

After some years of negotiations and commitment from the EU Parliament and the EU Commission, and the advocacy work of stakeholders such as the Alliance for Investing in Children, of which Make Mothers Matter is a member, the EU has taken this important step towards the eradication of poverty.

This initiative is set within the framework of the new [EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child](#) and the [Action Plan on the European Pillar of Social Rights](#) (principle 11 of the European Pillar of Social Rights, on childcare and support for children). It comes into effect at a time when families have become more vulnerable due to the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The European Child Guarantee targets children in need, such as: **children with disabilities** and **mental health issues**, **children living in precarious situations** (e.g. those living in a single-earner household; living with a parent with disabilities; living in a household where there are mental health problems or long-term illness); **homeless children**, **children from minority or ethnic backgrounds** and other disadvantaged groups of children.

The purpose of this initiative is to further protect the rights of children in Europe, especially of those in need, and to ensure more equal opportunities for them. To do so, the Council Recommendation calls for EU members to set up national action plans that guarantee **“effective” and “free” access to certain key services**: healthcare, high quality early childhood education and care, education and school-based activities, adequate housing and healthy nutrition.

The Council Recommendation provides a framework to help each country implement nationwide action plans to support children in vulnerable situations. This leaves each member state free to develop their own measures according to the nation's own needs and practices. The Council also recommends the member states to involve other relevant stakeholders such as non-governmental organisations working on children's rights.

Make Mothers Matter will continue to advocate the need to help children while focusing on the family as a whole, when making policies related to child poverty. **Family support** constitutes a **child's right** that has to be recognised and fulfilled. Considering that children aged 0 to 18 only spend 20% of their lifetime in formal settings (schools, day-care centres, etc.), they spend a significant amount of time at home. It is therefore vital to include families – mothers in particular – in order to find effective solutions to support children. Many children living in precarious situations live with their mother only and statistics show that these households are at a **higher risk of poverty**.

It is true that poor children grow up in poor families, so there is a need to support parents and primary caregivers in their role and to ensure they have adequate resources and free access to quality services to provide this support sustainably. Investing in families has a strong economic benefit. MMM advocates for the **meaningful participation of parents** and their involvement in implementing, monitoring, and evaluating all the activities connected with the Child Guarantee scheme, in order to effectively tackle child and family poverty and **break the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage**.

Find the complete statement here: [Recommendation on European Child Guarantee adopted](#)



MMM ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE MOTHERS' ROLE AND RIGHTS

Zero Waste Living – #CHANGE begins at Home

Sylvie Droulans, a Belgian mother of two, is a zero waste activist with an interesting story about her sustainable living journey. In this interview, she tells us how she reduced her household waste to a single mason jar per year and how the pandemic provided an opportunity to reinvent herself.

A few years ago, on the occasion of the International Day of Families, CIRC4Life partner MMM organised a successful conference on “The Role of Families in Achieving the Circular Economy”, in collaboration with the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC).

At this event, MMM presented the [CIRC4Life project](#) and highlighted how women and particularly mothers play a key role in promoting sustainable practices among their children, family and the communities they live in.

As parents are role models, they usually transfer their environmental and sustainable consumption patterns onto their children. Families are the place where education starts, where habits are formed, where initiatives and implementing acts can be first learned and explained. According to the UN, taking families into account accelerates the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

One of the speakers at this conference was Sylvie Droulans. It is a well-known fact that the consumer plays a pivotal role in the transition to a Circular Economy and from the start, our CIRC4Life project has made sure to include consumers in the process of designing innovative circular solutions for businesses. But Sylvie decided not to wait for companies and governments to take action; instead, she became an actor for change herself.

Nearly six years ago, she took recycling a step further and went down the zero waste path with her family. Starting out with a simple blog about her journey to reducing household waste to a single glass jar per year, she now runs her own “**Zero Waste Academy**”. “The pandemic was an opportunity for me to reinvent myself,” she says, “as my regular live conferences were no longer possible.” The academy is now already in its third edition and, according to Sylvie Droulans, a powerful tool for coaching people to become actors for change through their consumption habits.

Instead of giving the usual tips & tricks, she strives to inform participants on the mechanisms of waste and aims to provide understanding of how you can use individual capacity and strength to reinvent yourself. “People often have doubts or fears about a zero waste lifestyle,” she says, “and the academy gives them the time to slowly get accustomed to the idea.” She’s happy to see that for many participants, the time spent at the academy has been life changing. Sylvie Droulans has witnessed that, after spending the required three months, there is often no going back for her students. She adds that once they have experienced “the necessary lightbulb moments” and make the individual effort to persevere, the ball starts to roll for the majority of them.

Find the complete statement under [Zero Waste Living – #CHANGE begins at Home](#).

About Make Mothers Matter – MMM

Make Mothers Matter believes in the power of mothers to make the world a better place, advocating for their recognition and support as changemakers.

Created in 1947, MMM is an international NGO with no political or religious affiliations, transparently voicing the concerns of mothers at the highest level: the European Union, UNESCO and the United Nations (general consultative status).



MMM ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE MOTHERS' ROLE AND RIGHTS

Compiled by Irina Pálffy-Daun-Seiler, MMM Representative to the United Nations in Vienna, with input from Valérie Bichelmeier, Head of MMM UN Delegation, and Johanna Schima, Head of MMM European Delegation.

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Recent & Upcoming Events

September

- Sept. 16-17: International Conference on Family Studies
(Amsterdam, Netherlands, digital)
<https://waset.org/family-studies-conference-in-september-2021-in-amsterdam>
- Sept. 28- Oct. 2: AAFP: Family Medicine Experience (FMX)
(digital)
<https://www.aafp.org/events/fmx.html>

October

- Oct. 25-26: International Conference on Family Law and International Family Law
(Barcelona, Spain, digital)
<https://waset.org/family-law-and-international-family-law-conference-in-october-2021-in-barcelona>
- Oct. 25-26: International Conference on Family Business
(Istanbul, Turkey, digital)
<https://waset.org/family-business-conference-in-october-2021-in-istanbul>
- Oct. 28-29: International Conference on The Role of Families in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism
(Paris, France, digital)
<https://waset.org/the-role-of-families-in-preventing-and-countering-violent-extremism-conference-in-october-2021-in-paris>

November

- Nov. 2-5: National Council on Family Relations Annual Conference: The Science of Families: Nurturing Hope, Happiness, & Health
(Baltimore, Maryland, USA)
<https://www.ncfr.org/ncfr-2021>
- Nov. 4-6: Virtual National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health Conference
(digital)
<https://www.ffcmh.org/conference>
- Nov. 29-30: International Conference on Diabetes in Children
(Jerusalem, Israel, digital)
<https://waset.org/diabetes-in-children-conference-in-november-2021-in-jerusalem>

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