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Implementation of the objectives of the International Year of the Family and its follow-up processes

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [74/124](#). In the report, in view of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the Secretary-General addresses the impact of the crisis on families and elaborates on family-oriented policies to mitigate its effects on households. He also focuses on parenting and parenting education as a tool to enhance children's well-being and resilience in times of crisis and prevent violence against children. Lastly, he addresses the modalities for the preparations for the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, in 2024.



I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 74/124, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit a report at its seventy-sixth session, through the Commission for Social Development and the Economic and Social Council, on the implementation of the objectives of the International Year of the Family and its follow-up processes.
2. In the resolution, the Assembly addressed new, emerging issues of parenting and parenting education. It encouraged Member States to invest in family-oriented policies and programmes that enhance strong intergenerational interaction, such as parenting education, in an effort to promote intergenerational solidarity and social cohesion. It also encouraged Member States to invest in parenting education as a tool to enhance children's well-being and prevent all forms of violence against children, including through promoting non-violent forms of discipline.
3. The Assembly also requested that the appropriate ways and means of observing the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, 2024, be addressed, and called upon stakeholders to continue to provide information on their activities, including on good practices in support of the objectives of the International Year and its follow-up processes, to be included in the report.
4. In the present report, the Secretary-General addresses the issues mentioned above, focusing in detail on parenting and parenting education. He emphasizes the negative consequences of violence against children, such as corporal punishment, and discusses progress in parenting education programmes. He proposes the modalities for the preparations for the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, 2021–2024, based on consultations with stakeholders. In view of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the report begins with a brief analysis of the impact of the crisis on families and discusses policy responses to mitigate its negative effects on households.

II. The coronavirus disease pandemic and its impact on families

5. Starting as a health crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic had unprecedented effects on many spheres of life, including the economy, education and nutrition. It negatively impacted care arrangements, work-family balance, gender equality and other aspects of family life.
6. Besides the direct and indirect negative health impacts, the pandemic is likely to drive families into poverty, with estimates ranging from an additional 88 to 115 million people likely to be pushed into extreme poverty¹ and 150 million additional children likely to be driven into multidimensional poverty, according to data on access to education, health care, housing, nutrition and sanitation.² The preliminary research into the indirect health impacts of COVID-19, such as access to routine and urgent health care, has shown that mothers and children in low-income countries are at most

¹ Estimates as at 7 October 2020, available at <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/updated-estimates-impact-covid-19-global-poverty-effect-new-data>.

² Estimates as at 17 September 2020, available at <https://data.unicef.org/resources/impact-of-covid-19-on-multidimensional-child-poverty/>.

risk, with predictions of additional maternal and under-5 child deaths resulting from the disruption to health systems and decreased access to food.³

7. The pandemic is dramatically changing family life. Parents in mostly low-income households, who are more likely to work in essential industries, face the challenge of caring for their children in the absence of childcare facilities and school closures. They also tend to live in crowded conditions and multigenerational households with elevated exposure to infection and limited options for quarantining family members. Parents and caregivers able to work from home face the double challenge of telecommuting and caring for out-of-school children.

8. Low-income families have been especially hard hit by the pandemic, resulting in loss of employment, precarious housing situations, lack of access to online schooling and loss of nutrition due to school closures, to name but a few. What is more, low-income households face the threat of a possible further severe economic recession, which may further exacerbate levels of child poverty, with long-term consequences for children's physical and mental well-being, nutrition and learning outcomes.

9. From a gender perspective, the increased unpaid care work at home has been reinforcing existing gender inequality. COVID-19 hit harder in the economic sectors with high female employees, negatively impacting women's participation in the labour market, at the same time increasing their unpaid care work in households. This has been confirmed by surveys pointing to the fact that caregiving has fallen disproportionately on women worldwide.⁴ On the other hand, there is some emerging evidence that men have increased their contribution to household tasks, with some studies indicating that the gender care gap has somewhat narrowed.⁵

10. Several factors arising from COVID-19 have contributed to higher levels of parental burnout, including unemployment, financial insecurity and low levels of social support from extended family members, such as grandparents. Moreover, parents and caregivers have lost access to community centres and other sources of support. There is also a growing concern about the worsening of parental mental health, children's behavioural, mental and physical health, couples' relationship quality and family life satisfaction, with parent-child relationships increasingly strained.⁶ Parents report physical and mental exhaustion, decrease in sleep quality, distancing from their children and a growing perception of incompetence in their parental roles, all symptoms of parental burnout.⁷

11. There are indicators that parental burnout, resulting from high levels of parenting-related stress due to a mismatch between the demands of parenting and the

³ Timothy Roberton and others, "Early estimates of the indirect effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on maternal and child mortality in low-income and middle-income countries: a modelling study" *Lancet*, vol. 8, No. 7, July 2020. Available at [www.thelancet.com/journals/langlo/article/PIIS2214-109X\(20\)30229-1/fulltext](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/langlo/article/PIIS2214-109X(20)30229-1/fulltext).

⁴ Based on the preliminary analysis of the survey "Impact of the pandemic on family life across cultures", available at www.covidfamilystudy.org/. The survey was conducted in 18 languages among over 80,000 parents in over 70 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, North America and Oceania.

⁵ Based on studies in the United States of America and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. See Esuna Dugarova, "Unpaid care work in times of the COVID-19 crisis: gendered impacts, emerging evidence and promising policy responses", paper prepared for the online expert group meeting "Families in development", held from 16 to 18 June 2020, available at www.un.org/development/desa/family/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2020/09/Dugarova.Paper_.pdf.

⁶ Based on household surveys including "Impact of the pandemic on family life across cultures".

⁷ Annette K. Griffith, "Parental burnout and child maltreatment during the COVID-19 pandemic", *Journal of Family Violence*, 23 June 2020.

resources at parents' disposal to meet those demands, has been rising and can be linked to child abuse and neglect, which in turn may lead to a long-term negative impact on child well-being.⁸

12. During the COVID-19 pandemic, constrained economic activity, school closures and limited access to health, social and legal services have all increased the risk of domestic violence. School closures have affected over 1.5 billion children and limited access to school-based resources, including counselling. Reduced protection services for children also made it difficult to report and respond to violence.

13. Although the extent of children's increased risk of exposure to violence during the COVID-19 pandemic is still largely unknown, some countries have seen a surge in reports of violence against children at home. In addition, use of the Internet for remote learning tends to increase children's exposure to cyberbullying, risky online behaviour and online predators.⁹ The factors cited as increasing the risks of violence against children during the pandemic are, as noted earlier, parental stress and tension, as well as children's increased presence at home.

14. In terms of violence against women, emerging data shows an increase in calls to domestic violence helplines in many countries since the outbreak of COVID-19, with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) warning about a shadow pandemic of domestic violence.^{10,11}

15. Governments have employed a variety of family-oriented responses to COVID-19 in the main areas of parental leave and care services, as well as financial and utility support. Additional parental or sick leaves have been provided to affected working parents in many European countries, including Austria, Cyprus, France, Italy, Norway and Romania. Care services for children of essential workers have remained open in some countries, including Australia, Canada and the Netherlands. Additional financial support through child grants and other measures have been offered, inter alia in Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, the Republic of Korea and South Africa. In respect of utility support, some countries, such as Burkina Faso, Chad and Mali, have provided subsidies for water and electricity bills.¹²

16. Nonetheless, the responses to COVID-19 from the family and gender perspectives have been uneven. According to the United Nations Development Programme gender tracker, which includes over 2,500 measures with a gender perspective across 206 countries and territories and a focus on the areas of violence against women and girls, support for unpaid care and the strengthening of women's economic security, the gender response varies across regions and countries, with Europe leading the response on addressing violence and unpaid care.¹³

17. Overall, Governments have mostly focused their gender-related responses to the pandemic on preventing and/or responding to violence against women. Most social protection, care and job responses have not taken account of the needs of women, with only one third of countries taking action to support unpaid care and strengthen care services for children, older persons or persons with disabilities.¹⁴

⁸ According to the PEW Research Center, for parents continuing to work in the United States, 35 per cent report struggling with childcare responsibilities. See Griffith, "Parental burnout and child maltreatment during the COVID-19 pandemic".

⁹ See <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/goal-16/>.

¹⁰ See <http://unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/in-focus-gender-equality-in-covid-19-response/violence-against-women-during-covid-19>.

¹¹ See <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/goal-16/>.

¹² See Dugarova, "Unpaid care work in times of the COVID-19 crisis", 2020.

¹³ See <https://data.undp.org/gendertracker/>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

18. It is important to emphasize that, from an educational perspective, as children are out of school, or pursuing hybrid learning, the engagement of parents at home is crucial to facilitate continued learning, especially in areas with limited access to technology. Recent research by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) indicates that policy decisions about ongoing remote education should take account of parents' ability to help their children learn so that the global learning crisis that is widening learning gaps across socioeconomic groups can be mitigated. Parents are indispensable to encourage children to cope with these challenges. It is then key to support and instruct parents to engage with their children in activities such as homework and reading.¹⁵ Engaging parents to prevent violence against children at home has become even more urgent during the COVID-19 pandemic. On a positive note, digital resources for parents have been made available to help them cope with new challenges. UNICEF, for instance, provides online resources for parents for dealing with COVID-19 challenges, ranging from parenting in crowded homes to keeping children safe online.¹⁶

III. Violence against children, parenting and grandparenting and positive discipline

A. Corporal punishment as a form of violence against children

19. Violence against children, including violent forms of discipline such as corporal punishment, is widespread, despite its detrimental and often long-lasting negative effects. Close to 8 in 10 children from 1 to 14 years of age had been subjected to some form of psychological aggression and/or physical punishment at home in the previous month in 69 (mostly low- and middle-income) countries with available data from 2012 to 2019.¹⁷

20. Despite the nearly universal adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, violence against children continues, and corporal punishment, defined as the use of physical force, no matter how intense, with the intent of inflicting bodily pain, mostly as a form of discipline for the child's behaviour, is common across the globe. Rates of corporal punishment vary widely across countries, from 48 to 90 per cent. Globally, close to 80 per cent of children have experienced at least one instance of corporal punishment.¹⁸

21. Corporal punishment has been linked to children's lower self-esteem, poorer school performance, worse mental health, including the internalizing of problems such as anxiety and depression. Adults who have experienced corporal punishment report greater levels of depression, aggression and antisocial behaviour.¹⁹

¹⁵ Matt Brossard and others, "Parental engagement in children's learning" (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)-Innocenti, May 2020). Available at <http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/1091-parental-engagement-in-childrens-learning.html>.

¹⁶ See www.unicef.org/parenting/coronavirus-covid-19-guide-parents and www.unicef.org/coronavirus/covid-19-parenting-tips.

¹⁷ See <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/goal-16/>.

¹⁸ See Ben Freer "Global perspective on corporal punishment and its effects on children", paper prepared for expert group meeting, 2020. Available at www.un.org/development/desa/family/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2020/06/Freer_Expert-Group-Paper_Corporal-Punishment-Physical-Abuse_June2020.pdf.

¹⁹ Report of the online expert group meeting, "Families in development: assessing progress, challenges and emerging issues: focus on modalities for the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family and parenting education", held from 16 to 18 June 2020. Available at www.un.org/development/desa/family/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2020/08/expert-group-meeting.2020.Report.pdf.

22. There has been steady legal progress, with 58 countries prohibiting all corporal punishment of children, including at home, at school and in caregiving facilities, globally protecting 12 per cent of children. To date, some 30 countries have committed to considering legislation, while 132 countries have banned corporal punishment at schools.²⁰

23. Legal intervention at the State level is a necessary but not sufficient step to eliminate violence against children, including corporal punishment. As the family remains the locus of violence against children, that is where violence needs to end. Yet there are still many traditional child-rearing practices denying the dignity of the child. They stress subordination, especially of women and girls, and justify corporal punishment rather than communication, dialogue and participation.²¹ It is thus indispensable to change such harmful perspectives and practices at the family level.

B. Parenting practices, positive parenting and grandparenting

24. The prevalence of violence against children, heightened by the COVID-19 crisis and rising levels of domestic violence, with some indications of increased violence against children, all put into sharp focus the need to invest in parenting education. The emphasis on positive parenting, which encompasses positive discipline, can contribute to the reduction and prevention of violence against children.

25. Globally, authoritarian, permissive, uninvolved and authoritative parenting practices have been identified. Authoritarian parenting is based on firm control, focused on obedience. Permissive parenting avoids confrontation and has low enforcement of rules, while uninvolved parenting displays little communication and interaction with children. Inconsistent behaviours not captured by the three styles have been labelled as the “disorganized” parenting style.²² Violence against children is mostly associated with authoritarian parenting.

26. In contrast, authoritative parenting, described as assertive but not intrusive, demanding but at the same time responsive and supportive rather than punitive, has been recognized as an optimal parenting style, especially in Western research. Importantly, it has been linked to children’s high self-esteem, secure attachment and academic achievement. It should be kept in mind, however, that some research from the global South indicates that authoritarian practices may potentially interfere with highly valued, culturally relevant socialization goals, such as filial piety, that are prioritized, for instance, in China and India.²³ Overall, parenting within and across cultural contexts has not been adequately addressed in research.²⁴

27. Positive parenting is mostly associated with authoritative parenting. It can be defined as a continual relationship that includes caring, teaching, leading, communicating and providing for the needs of a child consistently and

²⁰ Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, “Global report 2019: progress toward ending corporal punishment of children” (2020). Available at <https://endcorporalpunishment.org/resources/global-report-2019/>.

²¹ Assefa Bequele “The next frontier in combating violence against children: the family” in *Celebrating Childhood: A Journey to End Violence against Children* (United Nations, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, 2016).

²² Brien K. Ashdown and Amanda N. Faherty, eds., *Parents and Caregivers Across Cultures: Positive Development from Infancy Through Adulthood* (Springer International Publishing, 2020).

²³ Achu Johnson and others, “Parents and emerging adults in India” in Ashdown and Faherty, eds., *Parents and Caregivers Across Cultures*.

²⁴ Arminta Lee Jacobson and Rudy Ray Seward, “International research on parenting and parent education: collaborative conference and beyond”, *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, vol. 42, No. 1 (2011), pp. 1–13.

unconditionally.²⁵ It promotes a child's development through affection, responsiveness, encouragement and teaching and supports the child's capabilities, interests and overall cognitive development. Importantly, positive parenting encourages a child's autonomy through responsiveness to the child's needs, supporting the child's exploration and decision-making, rewarding and encouraging positive behaviours and providing adequate supervision and monitoring.

28. Positive parenting has been linked to creativity, the ability to get on with others and an overall sense of mastery over the environment. Children also tend to be self-reliant and have better decision-making skills, and parent-child relations are bound to be stronger with higher trust. Communication, especially the ability to listen, is a cornerstone of positive parenting, which can also be credited with better emotional regulation and resilience.

29. Positive parenting applies to all developmental periods in a child's life, from toddler to teenager, and it results in children's increased sense of belonging, decision-making skills and school achievement and reduces behaviour problems, depressive symptoms and risky behaviours.²⁶ As for positive outcomes for parents, it improves their sense of competence, marital relationships and personal well-being over the life course. Moreover, research demonstrates that positive parenting goes beyond immediate effects and has a long-lasting positive impact on the life course of both children and parents.

30. It is important to keep in mind that caregiving is not limited to biological or adoptive parents but can be performed by grandparents or other relatives. Close to two thirds of adults will eventually become grandparents and, thanks to increasing life expectancy, they will be able to be grandparents for about a third of their lives. Despite its importance, the topic of grandparenting is mostly underreported in research on parenting. There are many positive impacts of grandparenting on grandchildren, including financial contributions, caregiving and guidance. Grandparenting is also positively correlated with enhanced adolescent well-being.

31. The role of grandparenting varies among families and cultures, with some studies indicating that the quality of the grandparent-grandchild relationship is most strongly correlated with the bond between the grandparent and parent. Some research indicates that very good and frequent contacts between grandchildren and grandparents correlate with more favourable feelings toward older persons in general by younger generations, with positive implications for counteracting ageism.

32. Moreover, grandparents have been found to have a positive effect, serving as a major support system in times of family breakdown and divorce and especially in skipped generation families. The role of grandparents in culture transmission has been explored to some extent, with research suggesting that grandparents as storytellers impart intergenerational narratives to support the development of identity among the younger generations. Research indicates that such narratives provide a means for achieving individual well-being through the psychosocial development of individuals.²⁷

33. In Asia, about a quarter of households are multigenerational families, with grandparents and grandchildren living together. The role of grandparents is shaped by social and cultural expectations, ranging from occasional helper to instrumental

²⁵ See Ignacio Socias Piarnau, "Positive parenting: concept and applications", paper prepared for the expert group meeting, 2020, available at www.un.org/development/desa/family/2020/06/09/impact-of-covid19/ignaciosociaspositiveparenting/.

²⁶ See <https://positivepsychology.com/positive-parenting/>.

²⁷ Harry W. Gardiner, "Grandparenting across cultures" in Brien K. Ashdown and Amanda N. Faherty, eds., *Parents and Caregivers Across Cultures*.

support. Grandparenting is seen as routine part-time assistance with childcare and cultural transmission. As a result of internal labour migration, the involvement of grandparents in caring for their grandchildren is expected to increase in the region. The effects of grandparenting on grandparents seem to be better mobility and life satisfaction. As for the effects on children, mixed results have been reported, with positive impacts relating to good mental health, greater resilience and prosocial behaviour in youth but behavioural problems in school-age children.²⁸

34. Research on grandparenting, mostly in Western societies, indicates that, as care-giving responsibilities may be imposed upon grandparents, they can be ill-equipped to address children's issues such as tantrums or delinquency. The needs of grandfamilies or kinship families (families in which grandparents, other adult family members or close family friends are raising children with no parents in the home)²⁹ require special attention also in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to foster the resilience of children and caregivers in times of crisis.

35. For instance, in the United States of America alone, about 2.7 million children are raised by grandfamilies, with parents absent owing to substance use, military deployment, incarceration, disability or death. COVID-19 poses greater risks to grandfamilies than to other types of families. In the United States, close to half of all grandparent caregivers are 60 or older and more likely to have a disability. They are also more likely to have compromised immune systems and are at higher risk of being infected. It is thus key for COVID-19 response efforts to ensure that grandfamilies can obtain the services and support that they need.

C. Parenting education, positive discipline and the role of fathers

36. In addition to health, nutrition and safety, responsive parenting that facilitates early learning is fundamental to children's healthy development. Accordingly, parenting education, defined as intervention or services aimed at improving parenting interactions, behaviours, knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and practices, and encompassing strategies of positive parenting, psychosocial stimulation and maltreatment prevention, is key. Parenting education programmes offer opportunities for stimulation, responsive parent-child interactions, child enrichment and early learning.³⁰

37. Effective parenting education can contribute to children's well-being, intergenerational bonding and social cohesion. The goals of parenting education include ensuring that parents understand children's developmental stages, and challenges and opportunities at each stage, act accordingly and avoid punitive disciplining methods.

38. Positive discipline forms part of positive parenting and punishments, in particular when violent, are recognized as likely to cause resentment, rebellion, revenge, retreat and reduced self-esteem in children. Moreover, research demonstrates that punishments and rewards are not effective in the long run and negatively impact intrinsic motivation and self-regulation, as well as the quality of family relationships. On the other hand, positive discipline is based on the premise

²⁸ Soohyun Kim, "Grandparenting: focus on Asia", paper prepared for the expert group meeting, 2020, available at www.un.org/development/desa/family/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2020/06/EGM2020.Grandparenting-in-Asia.SK_.pdf.

²⁹ Definition as contained in Generations United, "State of grandfamilies 2020. Facing a Pandemic: grandfamilies living together during COVID-19 and thriving beyond", available at www.gu.org/app/uploads/2020/10/2020-Grandfamilies-Report-Web.pdf.

³⁰ See input from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), available at www.un.org/development/desa/family/2020/08/06/family-policy-making/.

that, in addressing problematic behaviour there should be a focus on the common causes of such behaviour, relating to the unfulfilled need of children to belong and feel significant, and thus, by offering encouragement, children's need to belong and be heard is recognized.³¹

39. The tenets of positive discipline are based on mutual respect. The criteria essential to positive discipline include: helping children to increase a sense of connection, belonging and significance; it is both kind and firm; it is effective in the long run; and it teaches social skills fostering respect, concern for others, problem solving and cooperation. Investments in positive parenting involving positive discipline and reinforcing early stimulation, caregiving, attachment and bonding, free from violence, have a powerful impact on children, helping them to grow, learn and thrive.³²

40. In a nutshell, positive discipline involves clear rules and expectation, is consistent and aligns with long-term goals. It does not rely on threats and is neither permissive nor punitive.^{33,34}

41. Experts emphasize that violence prevention programmes and interventions with positive discipline components should be part of parenting education programmes and start prior to birth and continue throughout childhood. It should not be overlooked that, to be successful, parenting education programmes should go hand in hand with social protection interventions. Their overall goal should be to promote a nurturing family environment, reduce the risk of social exclusion and deprivation, prevent family stress and tackle social norms that condone violent forms of child discipline.³⁵

42. Investing in parenting education programmes with violence prevention components has the potential to change social norms relating to physical punishment of children and based on the belief that parents and teachers should use violence as a means of control and discipline. Well-informed parents and other caregivers can create a nurturing environment free of violence where children can thrive. Parenting education should be aimed at presenting evidence to parents that corporal punishment is harmful and does not work.

43. Parenting education programmes, including home visiting programmes, have been found effective in reducing child mistreatment by promoting a secure environment, encouraging capable caregiving by parents and improving material support for families by connecting them to health and social services. Involving fathers in parenting education programmes is also essential and has been credited with benefits for children and reduction in domestic violence.

44. It is important to emphasize that fathers distinctly contribute to children's development, including nutrition and safety, early learning and responsive care. Their positive engagement in caring for their children has been linked to better physical and mental health, improved cognitive development and educational achievement, better peer relations and higher empathy, as well as fewer behavioural problems in boys and psychological issues in girls, higher self-esteem and lower rates of depression and substance abuse. In addition, the reduction of the use of harsh discipline by fathers

³¹ Jane Nelsen, and others, *Positive Discipline Parenting Tools* (New York, Harmony Books, 2016).

³² Ibid.

³³ See <https://positivepsychology.com/positive-parenting/>.

³⁴ Nelsen, *Positive Discipline Parenting Tools* (New York, Harmony Books (2016).

³⁵ Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, "Violence prevention must start in early childhood". Available at <https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/sites/violenceagainstchildren.un.org/files/documents/publications/earlychildhood.pdf>.

leads to the improvement of child early learning, as well as cognitive and socioemotional development.³⁶

45. Nonetheless, many barriers and constraints, related to restrictive gender norms and expectations, the lack of supportive work environment, and at the family level, rigid gender socialization, lack of exposure to childrearing from an earlier age and absence of male caregiver models deter men from taking larger childcare responsibilities.

46. It is thus essential to make sure that parenting education programmes involve both parents and communicate the positive effects of involved fatherhood on the lives of their children and counteract the obstacles and constraints mentioned above. Emerging fatherhood interventions show effectiveness in betterment of quality and quantity of care provided by fathers, better couple communication and reduction of violence in the family. It is imperative that such programmes not only support both parents and improve their parenting skills but also challenge restrictive norms sustaining power imbalances and violent relationships. It is also important to make sure that programmes and interventions engaging men respond to women's needs and priorities by engaging fathers as positive, non-violent caregivers, which is critical to children's well-being, equality in caregiving and broader gender justice.³⁷

47. In all settings, a gender lens should be used when designing and implementing parenting education programmes, promoting co-responsibility in unpaid work and avoiding the replication of stereotypical gender roles. The focus on encouraging fathers' involvement should be ensured and strengthened. Parenting education addressing the challenges after separation and divorce, as well as foster parenting, also requires special attention.³⁸

48. A systematic review of parenting programmes, prepared for the *Ending Violence in Childhood Global Report 2017*, showed that parenting programmes could reduce the risks of child maltreatment by improving maternal psychosocial health and changing parental perceptions about harsh discipline. The review indicates that, although it is difficult to measure their impact, the available data indicate that parenting programmes can reduce child maltreatment. In some countries, perinatal home-visiting programmes and family-based early childhood parenting programmes reduced physical abuse and neglect. This has been achieved by addressing parental attitudes and relationships between partners.³⁹

49. There has been progress in family education and parenting education at the regional level. Regional directives, such as the 2006 European Council Recommendation Rec(2006)19 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on policy to support positive parenting, encouraged Governments to make legislative and programmatic investments to develop family support interventions aimed at guaranteeing children's rights. The importance of positive parenting has been also recognized by the Council of Europe, which indicated that positive parenting respects

³⁶ Clara Alemann, Aapta Garg and Kristina Vlahovicova, "The role of fathers in parenting for gender equality", paper prepared for the expert group meeting, 2020, available at https://un.org/development/desa/family/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2020/06/Parenting-Education_-the-role-of-fathers_-paper_CA.pdf.

³⁷ Examples of programmes engaging fathers can be found in Alemann, "The role of fathers in parenting for gender equality".

³⁸ See examples of such programmes in Canada in Nora Spinks and others, "Families 'safe at home': the COVID-19 pandemic and parenting in Canada", paper prepared for the expert group meeting, 2020. Available at www.un.org/development/desa/family/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2020/06/COVID-19-Pandemic-and-Parenting-in-Canada-Nora-Spinks-Vanier-Institute-of-the-Family-.pdf.

³⁹ *Know Violence in Childhood: A Global Learning Initiative, Ending Violence in Childhood Global Report 2017*. Available at www.knowviolenceinchildhood.org/.

children's best interests and rights as set forth in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which also takes into account parents' needs and resources.⁴⁰

50. In Europe, North America and Australia, evidence-based parenting support programmes belong to the most successful interventions supporting positive parenting for promoting the well-being of children, parents and communities. Similarly, the Positive Parenting Program), a strategy aimed at reducing behavioural and emotional problems in children, developed in Australia and adopted in countries around the world, has been successful at transforming the lives of children, parents and communities.⁴¹

51. Other examples of successful programmes includes The Incredible Years, developed in the United States and widely used in Europe. It is a group-based strategy targeting young children with behavioural issues and focusing on parent-child relationship and developing parenting skills, which have shown reduced child conduct problems, lower parental stress and less use of harsh discipline.

52. In Latin America, parenting education programmes are delivered in various settings, such as family home visits, workshops and training at educational centres and media campaigns. Such initiatives are mostly part of health strategies, early education policies and, to a lesser extent, integrated care policies, and increasingly a component of comprehensive early childhood development social protection systems that integrate health, education, early stimulation, nutrition and care policies, as well as poverty reduction programmes, such as conditional cash transfers. Most programmes focus on supporting families with young children (up to 6 years of age) but there are also programmes covering rearing practices for adolescents.⁴²

53. Many existing programmes in the region provide assistance to women and children who have been victims of domestic violence, while other interventions are focused on health and early childhood education. These initiatives may indirectly have effects on social norms favouring violent discipline and may play a role in developing protective factors. In some countries, including Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Ecuador, family and community interventions involving families in the planning and management of early childhood education have been introduced, to ensure quality standards.⁴³

54. Evaluation of parenting programmes in Latin America indicates that systematic interventions with adequate funding should be strengthened, to sustain interventions over time and expand their coverage. The cultural relevance of the programme content must be considered, depending on the region's specificities and the demands of indigenous people and Afrodescendants. It is also imperative to incorporate families and communities as active partners so that the parenting initiatives can be incorporated into local cultural contexts.

55. Another consideration is to incorporate parenting programmes into other existing interventions, such as early childhood education and cash transfer programmes. Overall, parenting education programmes could be integrated into

⁴⁰ Mihaela Robila, "Parenting education in Europe", paper prepared for the expert group meeting, 2020. Available at www.un.org/development/desa/family/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2020/06/EGM_2020_M.Robila.pdf.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Based on the input from ECLAC. More information including examples of good practices from the region is available at www.un.org/development/desa/family/2020/08/06/family-policy-making/.

⁴³ Rosario Esteinou, "Parenting education in Latin America", paper prepared for the expert group meeting, 2020. Available at www.un.org/development/desa/family/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2020/06/ONU-paper-parenting-and-corporal-punishment-06-06-20.RE_.pdf.

health, education and poverty reduction strategies and as an important element of comprehensive early childhood development social protection systems that are gaining ground in the region.

56. A recent review of 108 programmes with parenting education components in the Middle East and North Africa indicates that only 34 programmes were parenting education-oriented. Most were built for awareness-raising or capacity-building of service providers. The study indicated many gaps, including: lack of programme evaluation or set criteria governing programmes; poor coordination among service providers; and the challenges of promoting positive parenting practices in vulnerable contexts.⁴⁴

57. Overall, researchers point out that there are very few examples of evidence-based parenting interventions that have been replicated in low and- middle- income countries, despite the fact that many generic parenting interventions have been tested in small randomized trials and found to be promising.⁴⁵

IV. Good practices in family policymaking

58. The recent review of family-oriented priorities, policies and programmes in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as reported in voluntary national reviews, 2016–2019,⁴⁶ indicates that families are important for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, with close to 90 per cent of countries making specific reference to families, especially in relation to Goals 1–5, 11 and 16. However, although families are referred to as units of diagnosis or targets, family-oriented policies are not considered an integral part of overall development efforts.⁴⁷

59. The analytical review indicates that the integrative nature of the 2030 Agenda demands multisectoral and comprehensive actions and the recognition of spill-over effects between Sustainable Development Goals. Although, many voluntary national reviews show a transitional trend towards assuming such approaches, only a few Governments have undertaken a family lens approach in order to tackle poverty and hunger and overcome education and health-care challenges, as well as gender inequality and violence against children and women. For instance, of the 95 Member States reporting on poverty, 33 are developing sound family-oriented policies to combat it. Some have implemented programmes that work closely with targeted families; others work with families as co-managers of programmes; and some involve

⁴⁴ Doha International Family Institute, “Parenting programmes in the Arab Region”, as reported in Ahmed Aref, “Parenting styles and programmes: what works for better parenting in the Middle East and North Africa region?”, paper prepared for the expert group meeting, 2020. Available at www.un.org/development/desa/family/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2020/06/Ahmed-Aref-Paper_Parenting-Styles-and-Programs-in-the-MENA-region_UNDESA-expert-group-meeting-1.pdf.

⁴⁵ See José Alejandro Vázquez Alarcón, “Civil society perspectives on parenting education and grandparenting”, paper prepared for the expert group meeting, 2020. Examples of parenting education programmes and support are contained in annex 1 of the paper, available at www.un.org/development/desa/family/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2020/06/REV-2-Parenting-Education-and-Civil-society_Vasquez.pdf.

⁴⁶ Rosario Esteinou, “Family-oriented priorities, policies and programmes in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as reported in the voluntary national reviews of 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019”. Available at https://un.org/development/desa/family/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2020/05/VNR-PAPER.FINAL_08.05.pdf.

⁴⁷ Policy brief, “Family-oriented policies and priorities in voluntary national reviews (2016–2019)”. Available at https://un.org/development/desa/family/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2020/05/Briefing-Paper_VNRs-and-OPs-2019.pdf.

parents in planning to overcome their precarious socioeconomic conditions or address their specific needs.⁴⁸

60. In its analysis of State action for the implementation of target 16.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals, on elimination of violence against children, the voluntary national review indicates that only Armenia, Chile, the Dominican Republic, Ghana, Iraq, Mexico, Peru, Serbia, Sweden and Vanuatu report information about violence against children by their caregivers; and only Australia, Germany and Norway implement positive parenting programmes as main strategies to eradicate harmful parenting practices and as part of their approach to achieving targets under Goal 16.⁴⁹

61. In addition, several Governments provided examples of good practices in parenting education and related topics in response to the note verbale sent by the Secretariat. The responses can be found at a newly created website documenting recent good practices in family policymaking. It is expected that Governments will continue to contribute to this repository of good practices.⁵⁰

V. Appropriate ways and means to observe the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, 2024

62. The Focal Point on the Family, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) undertook consultations with stakeholders, including Member States, United Nations and regional entities, academics and civil society on the modalities for preparations for the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family.

63. In response to the note verbale sent by the Secretariat in early 2020, Member States expressed support for the preparations and observance of the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, indicating plans to hold events at the national level, mostly in collaboration with other stakeholders, including civil society. Several Member States indicated readiness to start preparations for the anniversary, noting awareness-raising events and public education campaigns, while others observed that the COVID-19 pandemic made it impossible to plan on specific activities. Some Governments indicated that they were launching or relaunching national policies for support for and the strengthening of families.⁵¹

64. Member States suggested several topics of research to be conducted as part of the preparations for the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, such as family stability and relationships; intra-family relations, including the elimination of domestic violence, abuse and harmful practices; and the role of families in social cohesion; as well as issues of migration, immigrant and transnational families.

65. The impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the well-being of families was also noted, including in the context of the role of families as promoters of healthy lifestyles. The importance of support for reproductive health and family planning and the preparations of young people for family life was also mentioned, as was the need for

⁴⁸ Ibid., list of countries.

⁴⁹ See www.un.org/development/desa/family/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2020/05/VNR-PAPER.FINAL_08.05.pdf.

⁵⁰ See all responses received from Government, United Nations and regional entities. Available at www.un.org/development/desa/family/2020/08/06/family-policy-making/.

⁵¹ Responses to notes verbales from Member States and United Nations and regional entities are available at www.un.org/development/desa/family/2020/08/06/family-policy-making/. Please note that some Member States offered additional suggestions on preparations for the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family via email follow-ups.

a stronger focus on gender equality and the promotion of the rights and well-being of women and children within families.

66. Some specific suggestions from Member States were to link the preparations for the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family with the upcoming International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour, 2021, with the message that strong families are needed to effectively protect children affected by or at risk of child labour, violence, abuse and exploitation. Cooperation with the European Forum on the Rights of the Child was suggested. A focus on a proposed child guarantee for vulnerable children, with a special emphasis on topics such as fighting poverty and partnership-based reconciliation of family and working life, was also recommended.⁵²

67. United Nations and regional entities noted the issues of child labour in agriculture, including family farming. Children's participation in families and upholding of the best interests of the child, especially in separated and divorced families, as well as intrafamilial violence, was noted. Other topics worthy of attention included the impact of the 2030 Agenda on the development of family-oriented policies.

68. United Nations entities suggested focusing on the issues of children's rights and violence prevention. The role of families in social protection provision under Sustainable Development Goal 1, as well as issues relating to inequalities under Goal 10, was also raised.⁵³

69. As part of consultations on preparations for the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, DESA convened an expert group meeting bringing together academics and civil society. Experts acknowledged that responsive policies supporting families affected by demographic shifts, urbanization and migration, climate change and technology were urgently needed if many targets of the 2030 Agenda were to be fulfilled.⁵⁴ Stakeholders agreed that a systematic review of mega trends and their impact on families would greatly contribute to meaningful preparations for the anniversary.

70. Experts noted that it was important to recognize that the mega trends noted above can be shaped by policy, but that their impact on families should be recognized and considered. In practical terms, the impact of these trends on families should be explored and conclusions drawn as to which family-oriented policies have the potential to harness positive aspects of the trends to benefit families and counteract their negative effects.

71. Participants at the expert group meeting also emphasized the importance of focusing on the following emerging issues: parenting education and support; new aspects of work-family balance and unpaid work; and the social consequences of the COVID-19 crisis. Experts noted that more focus was needed on unpaid care and a redesigned workplace, as well as gender equality and violence prevention. The sharing of good practices should be maintained and enhanced.⁵⁵

⁵² See www.un.org/development/desa/family/2020/08/06/family-policy-making/.

⁵³ Responses to notes verbales from Member States and United Nations and regional entities are listed on the good practices website at www.un.org/development/desa/family/2020/08/06/family-policy-making/.

⁵⁴ Bahira Trask, "Mega trends and families: the impact of demographic shifts, international migration and urbanization, climate change and technological transformations", paper prepared for the expert group meeting, 2020. Available at www.un.org/development/desa/family/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2020/06/UN.MegaTrends.Final_.Trask_.2020.pdf.

⁵⁵ See <https://un.org/development/desa/family/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2020/08/EGM.2020.Report.pdf>.

72. Civil society organizations, consulted via survey and email exchanges, put forward the topics of work-family balance and unpaid work, in particular unpaid care work. Another topic was positive parenting and parenting education. Some suggested a focus on multigenerational families. Others indicated the need to focus on poverty and post-COVID-19 economic recovery. General family well-being in terms of physical, mental and social well-being and the building of sustainable cities and communities for all was also emphasized.

73. Recognition of mothers as caregivers and changemakers was noted, as was unpaid family care work, put into sharp focus by the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, “care drain” in many developing countries owing to women’s migration to other countries was noted. How to put care at the heart of economies, mainstream care into policymaking and better support families with care responsibilities was deemed to need further attention.

74. Civil society noted that modern parenting is increasingly challenged by technological changes, urbanization and climate change, as well as migration. Such trends pose new challenges and necessitate more resources to help parents with caring for their children. Developing parenting skills and parental awareness and knowledge is essential if parents are to tackle these challenges successfully. Early childhood is especially important, with a nurturing family environment and care.

75. Civil society also noted that more attention should be paid to the issues of poor working conditions and health regulations affecting low-income and migrant families, especially in the informal economy. In addition, it noted the need to work towards a culture of acceptance for different forms of families.

76. Several European civil society organizations expressed interest in focusing on demographic trends and dropping birth rates, particularly in Europe. An international demographic meeting was suggested to discuss and evaluate the level of public assistance given to families, especially in terms of childcare policies and its impact on demographic trends.

77. Overall, stakeholders acknowledged that 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 families. The topics of research indicated by stakeholders can be broadly grouped under Sustainable Development Goals 1–5 and Goal 16. Among those, Goal 3, with regard to the role of families in the promotion of health and well-being, and Goal 5, on issues relating to gender equality, work-family balance and unpaid work in families, have been of importance. Under Goal 16, the broad topic of the role of families in social cohesion, as well as violence prevention, can be discerned.

78. Consequently, DESA recommends focusing on the megatrends noted above and their impact on families in an effort to recommend responsive family-oriented policies to harness the positive aspects of those trends and counteract their negative aspects.

79. To raise awareness of mega-trends and present research on their impacts on families, the observance of the International Day of Families, 2021–2024, would focus on each trend, starting with families and new technologies in 2021 and followed by: families and demographic trends; families, urbanization and international migration; and families and climate change.⁵⁶ Within this broad framework, specific research on related issues indicated by stakeholders would be conducted. Major background research papers would be launched at each observance of the

⁵⁶ The timing of specific themes is to be determined according to the future priority themes of the Commission for Social Development and other factors.

International Day and additional awareness-raising events on related topics organized.

80. A second analysis of voluntary national reviews, 2020–2024, with a focus on relevant topics suggested by stakeholders as pertaining to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets under Goals 1–5 and 16, will be conducted and a background paper launched in 2024. Other topics for research contained in the stakeholders' recommendations will be the focus of upcoming reports of the Secretary-General, as well as awareness-raising and advocacy events, including during side events of the sessions of the Commission for Social Development to be held from 2021 to 2024. In addition, two preparatory expert group meetings for the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family will be conducted in 2022 and 2024 to assess progress in family policymaking in the areas noted in this section.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

A. Conclusions

81. The COVID-19 pandemic presented families with new challenges and put into sharp focus their irreplaceable role as economic and care providers. While targeting the most vulnerable is key, all families need support to continue their economic and caregiving roles. Investing in families as social safety nets and care providers is indispensable to counteract the negative impacts of the pandemic, strengthen the resilience of children and caregivers and build back better in the aftermath of the crisis.

82. Many Governments recognized this reality and enacted or expanded policies and programmes in response to the health, economic and care crises faced by households. Child allowances, additional family leaves, flexible work solutions and other measures supporting families with children have been enacted worldwide. Such measures, in which parental economic and nurturing roles are recognized, need to be integrated into broad policy frameworks and made part of more inclusive and resilient socioeconomic systems to protect and empower families and ensure that they can cope with challenges ahead.

83. Significantly, the pandemic made more visible the issue of unpaid care work and a growing need to design comprehensive care systems with a gender perspective that foster co-responsibility between men and women, the State, the market, families and the community. Such systems should include policies on services, resources and infrastructure and universal, good-quality public services to meet the different care needs of families, as part of comprehensive social protection systems.

84. As the current crisis impacted the stress levels of caregivers, often resulting in parental burnout, the threat of violence in households increased. Consequently, COVID-19 responses should also be focused on the prevention of violence against women and children, which needs to be integrated into the sectors responding to the pandemic, including health, education, social protection, law and justice.⁵⁷

85. Irrespective of the current crisis, violent forms of discipline are still a globally prevailing norm, with serious and lifelong negative effects for children worldwide. Advocacy and investments in child protection solutions are urgently needed to counteract this continuing trend.⁵⁸ In particular, investments in parenting education

⁵⁷ Amiya Bhatia and others, "COVID-19 response measures and violence against children". Available at www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/98/9/20-263467.pdf.

⁵⁸ See <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/goal-16/>.

focused on positive parenting and positive discipline can help reduce and prevent violence against children.

86. The benefits of positive parenting for children are clear: they tend to thrive, enjoy better relationships and effective communication with their parents; and experience better school performance and overall well-being. Positive parenting, fostering children's self-esteem and creativity and turning children into self-reliant and confident individuals, deserves more attention from policymakers.

87. To achieve positive parenting, parenting education is critical as parents need practical tools to optimize family well-being and eliminate harsh forms of discipline. As grandparenting is rarely addressed in parenting education, the characteristics of grandparents and other caregivers should be considered in the design of parenting education programmes and materials.

88. Parenting education should be seen as an investment in children's well-being, and parenting programmes should address a variety of parenting practices, including child-parent communication and support. Evidence-based effectiveness of programmes, and the cultural context, should guide the choice for programme transfer and adoption. It is also important to translate national policies to local levels, without decreasing their effectiveness, through collaborations between central and local government and other stakeholders, such as academia and non-governmental organizations. Moreover, it is important to encourage the participation of parents and caregivers in parenting education programmes through school-caregiver communication and public media campaigns informing the public of the benefits of positive parenting and positive discipline.

89. Parenting education programmes are not yet widely recognized by Governments as conducive to the achievement of several Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal 16, as evidenced by the recent voluntary national review. Nevertheless, their importance is gradually being recognized at the local level, with many assessments pointing to their numerous benefits. Evaluations indicate that long-term government financial support, the inclusion of parenting education programmes in strategic planning at the national and local levels, as well as having accredited professionals implementing them, is indispensable for ensuring their continued success. Strong political commitment and effective stakeholder collaboration, and the inclusion of central and local levels of government, academic institutions, international agencies and civil society in the development, dissemination and implementation of positive parenting initiatives, are indispensable for the programmes to succeed.⁵⁹

90. Importantly, as determined action is needed to end all violence against children, the elimination of corporal punishment may well be the first step in that direction. Parenting education programmes with violence prevention and positive discipline components are key to ending violence at home and contribute to the vision of the 2030 Agenda of the world free from fear and violence.

91. The preparations for the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, 2024 give us an opportunity to put families at the centre of development efforts and focus on issues of concern to families highlighted in the present report.

B. Recommendations

92. **Member States are encouraged to consider the following recommendations:**

(a) **Recognize the importance of families and family-oriented policies to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, integrate such policies in the overall**

⁵⁹ Robila, "Parenting education in Europe" (2020).

socioeconomic policymaking and periodically reflect on the progress achieved, inter alia, in the voluntary national reviews as part of the sharing of good practices in family policymaking;

(b) In response to COVID-19 and beyond, enhance support to working parents through expanded child and family benefits, paid family leave and sick leave, improved flexibility of working arrangements and gender-responsive services to reduce the burden of care;

(c) Promote the preparations for the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, 2024 at the national, regional and international levels through practical initiatives, including family-oriented policies and programmes responding to the needs of all families;

(d) As part of the preparations for the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, support research and awareness-raising activities at the national, regional and international levels, on the impact of technological, demographic, urbanization, migration and climate change trends on families in order to harness their positive effects and mitigate their negative impacts;

(e) Invest in parenting education programmes in cooperation with families and relevant entities at the national level, as well as with regional and international organizations, civil society and academics and ensure that the programmes are inclusive of grandparents and other relatives raising children; maintain a gender perspective and recognize the role of men in families;

(f) Enact policies and legislation banning all forms of violence against children, including corporal punishment. Such policies should be accompanied by positive parenting education programmes with positive discipline components, public education campaigns on children's rights and the detrimental impact of corporal punishment, as well as the benefits of positive, non-violent forms of discipline;

(g) Promote research on families and family policies and programmes, including programme evaluations and impact assessments, especially in the areas of parenting education and support, work-family balance and unpaid work and effective COVID-19 response, including building back better during the post-pandemic recovery efforts.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ See detailed recommendations on related issues from the online expert group meeting. Available at www.un.org/development/desa/family/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2020/08/EGM.2020.Report.pdf.