Family-oriented policies and priorities in Voluntary National Reviews (2016-2019)

The analysis of 127 Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) submitted by 114 UN Member States (13 Governments reported more than once) indicates that families may be key to ensure progress towards the SDGs by 2030, with close to 90 per cent of countries making specific references to families. Governments consider family policies especially useful for the implementation of SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 11, and 16.

Governments mostly refer to families as units of diagnosis or as targets in their efforts towards the achievement of SDGs above, but family-oriented policies are not considered an integral part of overall development efforts.

The potential of families and family-oriented policies to achieve SDGs remains to be fully addressed in overall socio-economic policy making.

Member States reporting family-oriented policies

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

Families are regarded as active agents in development and are well supported in countries that have a robust institutional welfare system. In others, the institutional context is more challenging and assistance to low-income families provided on ad hoc basis.

Reporting on family-oriented policies to achieve Sustainable Development Goals 1-5, 11 & 16 (2016-2019)

Some Member States with a well-developed welfare system, have promoted family farming as a tool to reinforce big chains of production-commercialisation-consumption of food to boost agriculture while integrating vulnerable families. Others facing major challenges as a result of hunger and food insecurity, primarily implement it to support vulnerable families.

Few Member States have developed educational and health efforts aimed at changing parental behaviours to improve children’s nutrition.
Although substantial progress is reported, several Member States address maternal, neonatal and infant mortality rates primarily through a medical and clinical lens, which has been acknowledged as necessary but insufficient to achieve SDG 3 targets.

Adolescent pregnancy and the use of contraceptive methods are either underreported or are a cause of concern. Due to prevalent gender-biased values, most countries fall behind in developing policies in these areas.

The most effective family-oriented policies are within the field of family-work balance. 12 Member States provide different, coordinated and comprehensive parental leave schemes to promote a better-shared responsibility and conciliation between family and work. Some also provide flexible work, public or private childcare facilities, or shared parental or family relative’s leave to alleviate women’s work burden and promote their empowerment.

Early Childhood Education is offered in several countries, but only 11 have implemented programmes to empower parents as collaborative agents in improving the quality of education. They aim at developing parenting skills and engaging parents in school plans to enhance children’s proficiency and competence. Some Member States have extended this to primary education.

Few Member States have introduced the development of values and ‘soft skills’, promoting ethical stands based on civic culture and human rights but families, as intergenerational agents, are not involved in reinforcing them.

Gender equality remains a widespread and central concern. All reporting Governments have or are in the process of incorporating gender equality issues at the legislative level.

These measures represent most of the efforts undertaken, and several Member States have acknowledged their limited reach to reduce gender inequality due to the deep sociocultural barriers grounded in prevailing traditional gender values.

24 Member States reported progress with respect to inclusive and accessible green and open public areas. However, only 3 involve families, through legislations or programmes, in feeding policymaking, planning and management of local areas, such as residents deciding where new homes, green spaces and other facilities should go and how they should ‘look and feel’.
Although the information is insufficient, violence against children and women are reported as serious challenges by several countries. Strategies to combat it have been focused mainly on victim support and legislative measure. However, comprehensive, family-oriented policies are either lacking or fragile.

Parental violence against children is often reported as a result of domestic violence rather than harsh parenting practices. Hence, only Australia, Germany and Norway have implemented positive parenting programmes aimed at reducing it.

Member States acknowledge that sexual violence against women by age 18 is an issue of concern. It is exerted primarily by intimate partners. Similarly, it is primarily noted as an issue of domestic rather than gender-based violence. Therefore, the implementation of policies and programmes aimed at empowering women and building equal, close and positive partner relationship is hindered.

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