



UNITED NATIONS NATIONS UNIES
Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)
Division for Inclusive Social Development

Concept Note

United Nations Expert Group Meeting
New York, 14-15 May 2026

Families, megatrends, inequalities and family and child wellbeing

The Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD) of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) is organizing an expert group meeting on “Families, megatrends, inequalities and family and child wellbeing” to be held in New York on 14-15 May 2026.

In the follow-up to the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family and beyond, the United Nations entities and relevant stakeholders have been called upon to promote the effective follow-up to the anniversary at the national, regional and international levels through initiatives, including family-oriented policies and programmes responding to the needs of all families. Moreover, stakeholders have been invited to support research and awareness-raising activities at all levels on the impact of technological, urbanization, migration, demographic and climate change, and other contemporary trends on families.¹

The 2025 Doha Political Declaration of the Second World Social Summit has committed Member States to integrating the role of the family as a central enabler and contributor to social development and promoting social and economic policies that are designed to meet the needs of families and their individual members. It also recommended investments in early childhood

¹ ‘Follow-up to the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family and beyond’ General Assembly resolution A/RES/80/183 of 22 December 2025

development and committed stakeholders to taking effective measures to address the underlying causes of inequality.²

In an effort to respond to the mandates stemming from those instruments, DISD/DESA is bringing together academics, policy makers, and civil society representative to explore issues relating to megatrends, inequalities and their impacts on family and child wellbeing.

Global megatrends relating to technological innovation, demographic shifts, migration, urbanization, and climate change have been impacting socio-economic conditions often resulting in growing inequalities which in turn have been constraining families' ability to provide for their members and have negatively impacted family formation, resource allocation, and child wellbeing. For instance, research indicates that children born in families faced with income instability, weak caregiving support and limited access to basic services tend to experience developmental setbacks that persist into adulthood impacting social development outcomes.

Megatrends often exacerbate and widen global inequalities which have also been driven by income and wealth disparities and uneven impacts of global crises. Inequalities affect access to education, healthcare, digital connectivity, opportunities for social mobility and reinforce intergenerational cycles of disadvantage. Income inequalities as well as those based on age, gender, race, ethnicity, migrant status, and disability have been on the rise, diminishing opportunities for social development and undermining global efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

For instance, despite multiple initiatives to expand access and affordability, inequalities in access to and use of digital technologies have persisted. Moreover, rapid technological change has tended to reinforce, amplify, and reconfigure inequalities, potentially exacerbating discrimination or generating new forms of it. For instance, gender inequalities in technology production and consumption have been reflected in the development and use of artificial intelligence (AI) which has the potential to ameliorate social inequalities, but achieving this potential—and empowering people and communities—requires considering social contexts so that policy choices on the trajectory of AI and its deployment advance human development.³

² A/RES/80/5 available at: <https://social.desa.un.org/world-summit-2025/documents/doha-political-declaration-of-the-world-social-summit-under-the-title>

³ The 2025 Human Development Report, *A matter of choice: People and possibilities in the age of AI*

Importantly, inequalities in income, housing, digital access, and other areas systematically disadvantage families, in particular low-income households, migrant families, single-parent households, large families, and those living in informal settlements. Moreover, persistent inequality leads to inefficient allocation of resources and limits human potential, preventing families from improving their circumstances and overall wellbeing.

Although, the family is recognized as the fundamental unit of society, in practise, families are not adequately supported by current public systems, which contributes to rising inequality and weakening of social cohesion. Family policies are fragmented and spending on the youngest children remains low, with early intervention often treated as discretionary in most low and middle-income countries.

As global discussions on social development increasingly acknowledge the importance of megatrends noted above as well as growing inequality and their effects on families and child wellbeing, it is imperative to advance knowledge on the impact of megatrends on growing inequality in search of adequate family-oriented policies able to respond to new challenges and opportunities.

As current megatrends tend to exacerbate inequalities, stronger focus on family strengthening and early childhood development is needed. It is imperative to realize that child wellbeing and human capital formation depend on inclusive social policies that support families. Such support is bound to positively impact sustainable development driving more equitable growth, strengthening social outcomes, and reinforcing long-term social and economic development.⁴

Purpose of the meeting

The expert group meeting will explore the impact of megatrends on growing inequalities affecting family and child wellbeing. Topics under discussion will include (1) megatrends and growing inequalities; (2) inequalities in the context of digital technological advances and the potential of digital technologies for advancing parenting education; (3) inequalities,

⁴ Dominic Richardson et al, *Families, inequality and child wellbeing in the context of the 2030 Agenda*”, May 2026, forthcoming

urbanization and migration; (4) inequalities, demographic transitions, and climate change; (5) families, inequalities and child wellbeing; (6) regional inequality trends and perspectives on family and child wellbeing.

The meeting will also address issues relating to the Doha Political Declaration of the Second World Summit for Social Development, such as integrating the role of the family as a central enabler and contributor to social development; promoting social and economic policies that are designed to meet the needs of families and their individual members; and investments in early childhood development.⁵ In addition, the meeting will provide forum for sharing good practices in inequality reduction and family and child wellbeing. The expert group meeting will result in recommendations on policy actions in areas noted above.

The conclusions and recommendations of the meeting will provide Member States and other stakeholders with expert analysis regarding the above. The findings and recommendations from the expert group meeting will be reflected in the upcoming report of the Secretary-General to the 81st session of the General Assembly on the Follow-up to the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family and beyond.

Methodology

Experts are asked to provide a paper, make a short presentation, participate in group discussions, and give their expert opinions and policy recommendations on family policy development, monitoring and implementation in the areas mentioned above. The experts are also expected to provide specific examples of good practices on topics under discussion and to offer detailed recommendations on the further development of policies, programmes, and strategies to support families in the areas noted above.

Outcomes

- Background papers (5-7 pages, single-spaced, excluding references, figures, and statistical tables) prepared by each expert on issues in the annotated agenda and including policy recommendations.
- Report of the meeting containing a summary of the discussion and policy recommendations, prepared by DISD/DESA.

⁵ A/RES/80/5

Papers by experts will cover issues identified in the agenda, explain their relevance, provide quantitative and qualitative evidence, analyse the roles of social institutions, give examples of good practices, and offer conclusions and recommendations.

Organizational matters

The in-person meeting, with possible online participation of some experts and observers, will be held at United Nations Headquarters in New York on 14-15 May 2064 from 9:30 am to 17:00 pm. At Session 4 of the meeting (15 May, 10-11:30 am, CR8) the observance of the International Day of Families will be held with 5 designated speakers (as per Agenda). Other EGM participants are expected to offer comments and participate in the discussions.

Experts will include academics from fields covering various aspects of family policy development and implementation, megatrends of growing inequalities, new technologies, migration, urbanization, demographic trends, and climate change as well as various aspects of family and child wellbeing impacted by the trends noted above. Experts from various regions will participate in the meeting in their personal capacities. The presentation should not exceed 20 minutes to allow for discussions. The presenters should submit their papers and presentation to the UN Secretariat by **11 May 2026**, the latest. Papers and presentations will be posted on DISD/DESA website.

The participants will meet in several working sessions.

- Each session will have brief introductory remarks or (a) presentation(s) by (an) expert(s), which will introduce the topic and provide context for the ensuing discussion (use of PowerPoint is encouraged but not required).
- A moderator for each session will lead the group discussion and will be responsible for a summary and compiling the recommendations from that session.
- Discussions and brainstorming will be the preferred method of work, and no formal conference-style presentations are envisioned.

- The working language of the meeting will be English, and there will be no interpretation provided. Session 7, the last session of the EGM focusing on good practices in Latin America will be conducted in Spanish. All submissions should be made available to the Secretariat in English.

Other arrangements

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