



**United
Nations**

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs



INTERNATIONAL
DAY OF FAMILIES
15 MAY [2026]

**Observance of the
2026 International Day of Families
15 May, 10:00 – 11:30 a.m., UNHQ, New York, CR8**

Families, Inequalities and Child Wellbeing

Background Note

Global inequalities have continued to widen in recent years, driven by persistent income and wealth disparities, unequal access to essential services, and the uneven impacts of global crises. Inequalities extend beyond income, affecting access to education, healthcare, digital connectivity, and opportunities for social mobility, reinforcing intergenerational cycles of disadvantage. Currently, the majority of the world population lives in countries where income inequality has increased in the last three decades with inequalities based on age, gender, race, ethnicity, migrant status and disability widespread in developed and developing countries alike, reducing opportunities for social development and undermining global efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Technological innovation, climate change and other megatrends have had broad and varied implications often resulting in growing inequalities.

Around the world, families experience profound transformations driven largely by megatrends and growing inequalities constraining their ability to adequately provide for their members. Economic inequality shapes family formation by influencing when and how households form, how many children they have, and how resources are allocated within households impacting the conditions under which children are raised. Without adequate support, the addition of children in households often increases the likelihood that households fall below the poverty line, reinforcing intergenerational disadvantage.

Importantly, child development outcomes cannot be addressed or improved without addressing the family context in which children are born and raised. Family formation decisions, under what economic conditions, and with what level of institutional support, shape patterns of poverty, inequality, productivity and dependency, and human capital formation over time. Children born into households facing income instability, weak caregiving support, and limited access to services are more likely to experience developmental setbacks that persist into adulthood.

Research shows that family structure can amplify economic inequality across generations because parental investments in children often reinforce existing disparities, limiting mobility for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Families with young children often face the highest risks of falling behind economically due to childcare responsibilities, limited access to decent work, and insufficient social protection measures. When families struggle to meet basic needs, children face increased risks of malnutrition, poor health outcomes, reduced educational attainment, and restricted social mobility.

Moreover, the environments in which children grow—family relationships, access to learning, safety, and emotional support—shape early childhood development and long-term outcomes. However, inequalities in income, housing, digital access, and family support services systematically disadvantage certain groups. Children in low-income households, migrant families, single-parent households, or families living in informal settlements are especially vulnerable.

In addition, inequalities rooted in gender, race, and social identity create additional burdens for families, particularly those facing intersecting disadvantages. Gender-based disparities, such as unequal workloads or limited access to education and jobs, heighten stress within families and reduce overall well-being. Racial and ethnic inequalities similarly restrict access to housing, healthcare, and employment, contributing to chronic marginalization that affects family stability and children's long-term outcomes.

Persistent inequality also fuels cycles of limited social mobility, leaving families trapped in disadvantage across generations. Research links inequality to wasted human potential, inefficient allocation of resources, and the formation of institutions that perpetuate unequal opportunities. These

systemic barriers prevent families from improving their circumstances and improving their wellbeing. Despite its importance, spending on the youngest children remains low, family policies are fragmented, and early intervention is often treated as discretionary in most low and middle-income countries.

This year's observance of the International Day of Families aims to demonstrate that engagement at international level is essential to elevate early family investment as a core social development priority. Family-oriented policies can accelerate social progress with family and child benefit policies stabilizing households when most vulnerable. Income support, maternity and parental benefits, childcare, and integrated family services reduce poverty risks, improve child outcomes, and support women's economic participation – especially when implemented early. Similarly, investments in well-designed child allowances enhance nutrition, school participation, and family resilience while reducing stress and improving caregiving capacities.

The 2026 Observance of the International day of Families aims to:

- Contribute to enhanced global understanding of how inequalities undermine family and child wellbeing
- Promote investment in integrated family-oriented social protection systems
- Highlight good practices in family policymaking to reduce inequalities and promote child wellbeing
- Share international good practices, including universal child benefits, parental leave systems, affordable early childhood education, and community-based family support services
- Foster dialogue among Member States, UN agencies, policy experts, and civil society organizations
- Contribute to increased commitment to the implementation of family-oriented policies
- Examine issues relating to the Doha Political Declaration of the Second World Summit for Social Development, including:
 - 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 promote investments in early childhood development

To that end, the research paper “**Families, inequality and child wellbeing in the context of the 2030 Agenda**” to be launched at the observance will elaborate on:

- Current inequality trends affecting families globally
- Family formation as a critical but under-addressed driver of inequality
- Megatrends and their impact on growing inequalities and families' wellbeing
- The relevance of family-oriented policies for achieving family and child wellbeing and reducing inequalities
- Urgency of action for family and child wellbeing in the context of 2030 Agenda
- Good practices in family policymaking aiming at inequality reduction

The event is open to the public and will be held at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

For more information contact:

Renata Kaczmarska

Focal Point on the Family, DISD/UNDESA

kaczmarska@un.org

References

World Inequality Database: <https://wid.world/>

“A New Policy Consensus to Accelerate Social Progress” World Social Report 2025.

“Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025” available at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2025/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2025.pdf>

Doha Political Declaration available at: <https://social.desa.un.org/world-summit-2025/documents/doha-political-declaration-of-the-world-social-summit-under-the-title>

Reduced inequalities (DESA website): <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/inequality>