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Statement submitted by Confédération des organisations familiales de l'Union européenne, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



Statement

Family policies towards the strengthening of social development

In the past few years, there has been a growing demand for policies that support the achievement of the international targets on poverty eradication, productive employment, social integration and social inclusion. The commitment by the Heads of Government of the States Members of the United Nations to lift millions of people out of poverty and social exclusion is not achievable without narrowing the gender gap, increasing the participation of women, people with disabilities and young people in the labour market, and enabling men to take more family responsibilities, thereby redefining gender expectations and roles.

Understanding and appreciating the global situation and acting accordingly and in a sustainable way are the main challenges faced by Member States. Labour market, employment and social policies have historically been designed to respond to the needs of their time and they need to be adapted to reflect today's society. Families and society have been, and still are, changing and evolving into more complex and diversified structures. These changes in society and in family forms, however, have not been transposed into the current social development policies.

Consequently, with the present statement, we urge the Commission for Social Development to keep pertinent social and family policies high on its agenda and to follow the recommendations made on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, in particular by keeping the spotlight on its two development themes: confronting family poverty and social inclusion, and ensuring work-family balance (referred to hereinafter as "work and family life reconciliation").

Consequently, we would like to emphasize the following two priority recommendations.

1. **Work-family balance: a holistic approach for effective change**

Policies aimed at reconciling work and family life tend to be seen as specific measures for women, or even more narrowly for young working mothers. This is, however, a discriminatory interpretation of workers' needs and gives way to the ineffective implementation of measures that are needed by all workers, regardless of their sex or family status. It is important that reconciliation policies (flexible working arrangements or tailored service provision) be made available to all workers, regardless of parental status or the age of their children, since families' needs for flexibility do not end with the enrolment of children in preschool. Parents of older children and teenagers have to respond to a different but equally important demand for a parental presence that requires a certain flexibility.

Furthermore, reconciliation policies must not be seen as a measures exclusively aimed at parents: those who care for an older or disabled relative also face specific situations that entail legitimate responsibilities outside of paid work and need to be taken into consideration. Finally, these needs may be temporary and last for shorter or longer periods, may occur abruptly or may be linked with the worker's well-being. Linking them to a specific family situation (e.g. being a parent or a carer) can therefore be limiting and create disparities among employees that can have a negative impact on the working environment. Designing and implementing

reconciliation measures are not and must not be considered as a gesture for women or employees with family responsibilities only, but a profound change in the way of organizing work and society.

In the light of the above, work and family life reconciliation policies are essential to implement change, promote employment and tackle poverty. Consequently, well-tailored awareness-raising campaigns must be set up and coordinated by the Commission to achieve the goals of the social development agenda in the post-2015 sustainable development framework. This could happen in the form of an action kit.

It is very important to note that there is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Measures must be tailored: private and public bodies must find the measures that are most appropriate for responding to the specific needs of their employees and employers. Furthermore, Member States should support the negotiation of a typical work arrangement, to be agreed at the national and company levels in close cooperation with the representatives of employers, employees and third parties.

2. Family poverty and social exclusion

There is a clear and direct link between difficulties in combining family life and professional life and the risk of poverty and social and economic exclusion. Family and social development policies are therefore key to any wider policy that seeks to tackle and prevent poverty and to improve social and economic inclusion.

Especially for the most vulnerable families, such as migrant families, single parents or large families, families with heavy care responsibilities for an elderly or disabled family member, the risk of poverty and exclusion (social and economic) is very high if one or both parents are excluded or distant from the labour market.

If Member States are to take poverty alleviation seriously, they should develop social investment strategies and effective employment policies with a strong focus on families experiencing poverty. Furthermore, these actions should be reinforced by a mix of policies combining: (a) access to and provision of resources, including benefits and allowances; (b) access to high-quality, affordable and accessible services; and (c) flexible time arrangements. In line with policy developments in the European Union, a strong policy on investing in children and in their early years (education, parenting support, housing and access to universal and targeted services for parents and children) is highly recommended. That requires long-term commitment but studies show that the return on this investment in both direct financial return and savings to the public budget is very high.

In sum, the challenges of growth, job creation, the fight against poverty and social inclusion are closely linked. Consequently, it is of utmost importance to recognize the fundamental role that various policies (social, development, employment, etc.) that support families can play for the prevention of poverty and breaking its intergenerational transmission.

We would like to conclude by thanking the Division for Social Policy and Development and, especially, the Family Focal Points for their commitment and dedication to the work that has been carried out to mark the 20th anniversary of the International Year of the Family and for the progress achieved in 2014.