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## Commission on Population and Development

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**Assessing the status of implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and its contribution to the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development during the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development**

### **Statement submitted by the International Federation for Family Development, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council<sup>1</sup>**

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.

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<sup>1</sup> The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

### **The impact of climate anxiety in youth transitions and family formation**

Youth transitions encompass a multifaceted and intricate landscape, particularly within the context of social and family issues. The challenges faced by new generations vary across the continent, making it a complex endeavour to integrate them seamlessly into society. Crucial aspects such as securing suitable employment, ensuring adequate incomes, and forming families and having children have become akin to navigating an obstacle course in many instances.

One notable demographic trend is the continual increase in the average age of mothers at the birth of their children. This phenomenon has unfolded alongside the initial resurgence of total fertility rates during the first decades of the 21st century, following marked declines in previous years. However, it is important to note that total fertility rates experienced a significant decline after reaching their peak in 2008. This decline has raised concerns about its implications on demographics, economics, and fiscal matters.

Recent research on OECD countries, employing panel data models and building upon prior studies, has established a link between these fertility fluctuations and shifts in the labour market positions of both men and women. Furthermore, changes in family policies, including parental leave and early childhood education and care, have been identified as contributing factors. This research provides valuable insights into the intricate dynamics that connect family policies, employment, and fertility, shedding light on the factors shaping overall population dynamics. (DELSA/ELSA/WD/SEM(2023)17).

Debates surrounding the severity of the consequences stemming from these demographic shifts abound. While an ageing workforce may pose economic challenges, it can be counterbalanced by a declining young-age dependency ratio and an increased female labour force participation rate.

However, there is another significant dimension that is poised to exert a profound influence in the coming years – the anxiety induced by warnings about climate change and its implications for the future of our planet. A recent extensive study published in *The Lancet* found that 40 per cent of Generation Z individuals (born between 1990 and 2010) worldwide are hesitant to have children due to concerns about the climate crisis. Similar sentiments have been echoed in surveys of millennials (Hickman, 2021. *Climate anxiety in children and young people and their beliefs about government responses to climate change: a global survey*, *Lancet Planet Health*).

As Ilaria Pitti has pointed out within the European context, it is worth keeping in mind that young people's commitment for the environment is not just a matter of civic and political participation but has also to do with their idea of transitions. Indeed, that commitment entails an idea of future and thus, also an idea of adulthood. By questioning the current model of growth and its effects on the planet, young people are also questioning the centrality that economy has in defining who is recognized as an adult and who is not. The standard model of transition to adulthood, by placing work and economic independence as a key step to achieve most of the other markers developed from and sustained the very modern illusion of achieving happiness through a continuous expansion of economy. (Pitti, 2022. *Understanding, problematizing and rethinking youth transitions to adulthood*).

The United Nations General Assembly, in Resolution [A/RES/77/191](#) of December 30, 2022, has recognized the impact of climate change trends on families as an important topic for research and awareness-raising activities at national, regional, and international levels. This acknowledgment is part of the preparations for the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2024, and it will be a central focus of the observance of the International Day of Families on May 15.

Emmanuel Pont, the author of « Faut-il arrêter de faire des enfants pour sauver la planète? » (Should we stop having children in order to save the planet?), argues that attempting to control population growth is both ineffective and unpalatable to many. (Pont, 2022. Faut-il arrêter de faire des enfants pour sauver la planète?: enquête sur la démographie mondiale). He contends that enforcing a draconian one-child limit in a country like France would result in only a marginal reduction in emissions, comparable to shutting down all coal-fired power stations. Pont also challenges widely held beliefs regarding the carbon footprint associated with having children.

Furthermore, the question arises: Is climate anxiety justified, or is it indicative of a more general apprehension about the future that seems to characterize young generations? According to Nick Luxmoore, the core issue with the future is not solely the prospect of climate change, war, unemployment, or other daunting challenges that young people confront. Rather, it is a deeper, existential anxiety that we often underestimate in the young people we care about. We, as older generations, may inadvertently contribute to this issue by envying their youth and their vast potential. (Luxmoore, 2019. Why young people fear the future).

In conclusion, the transitions experienced by young people are deeply impacted by a myriad of factors encompassing economic, demographic, and environmental considerations. These transitions exhibit intricate and multifaceted dynamics, demanding a comprehensive and nuanced approach. An imperative aspect of this approach is a dedicated focus on the future structure of family policies, which is essential to ensure that families attain the level of well-being required to fulfil their pivotal societal roles.

To actively engage with this issue, the International Federation for Family Development (IFFD) is orchestrating a series of events aimed at soliciting the perspectives of youth from around the world. Recognizing that young people are the architects of their own future, these initiatives empower them to learn, deliberate, and make decisions that will shape their destinies. It is our firm belief that by affording the youth a voice in shaping their world, we nurture their passion for effecting positive change from a young age. This, in turn, contributes to the cultivation of future leaders who are committed to making a difference in our global society.