



**United
Nations**

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs



INTERNATIONAL
DAY OF FAMILIES
15 MAY 2021

Families and New Technologies

Online Webinar in Observance of the

2021 International Day of Families

Friday, 14 May, 10:00-11:30 AM (New York time)

Background Note

Megatrends, including **new technologies**, **demographic shifts**, **rapid urbanization and migration trends**, as well as **climate change**, have been dramatically shaping our world in recent years, impacting individuals and families. In preparation for the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, 2024 (IYF+30) the Division for Inclusive Social Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs aims to raise awareness of mega-trends and present research on their impacts on families. The observances of the International Day of Families, 2021-2024 are to focus on each trend, starting with **families and new technologies in 2021**. The focus on megatrends is to facilitate the analysis of their impacts on family life and recommend responsive family-oriented policies to harness the positive aspects of those trends and counteract their negative facets.¹

¹ See Report of the Secretary General on the Implementation of the objectives of the International Year of the Family and its follow-up processes, A/76/61-E/2021/4.

The prolonged COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the **importance of digital technologies for work, education and communication**. The pandemic has accelerated technological changes that had already been under way both in society and at work, including the expanded use of digital platforms and related technological innovations like cloud computing and the use of big data and algorithms. As a result, innovative ways of working as well as flexibility for both employees and employers have been on the rise.²

On the other hand, concerns have been raised over some negative impacts relating to technology such as ‘screen fatigue’ and cyber bullying. In addition, school closures and increased demand for working from home, exacerbated already growing concerns over rising levels of **parental burnout** which can be linked to long-term negative impacts on child well-being.³ Now, more than ever, parents and caregivers, especially those engaged in full-time employment, need resources to successfully manage their parenting obligations. With the growing field of innovative technologies, new digital technologies have a potential to empower parents to meet such obligations successfully. In exploring the impact of new technologies on families, the observance of the International Day of Families will focus, in particular, on the current state and future potential of digital technologies in advancing parenting education.

Parenting education can be defined as interventions or services aimed at improving parenting interactions, behaviours, knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and practices, and encompassing strategies of positive parenting, psychosocial stimulation and maltreatment prevention. Parenting education is key for empowering parents to ensure children’s and family well-being and is fundamental to ensure children’s healthy development. In times of the COVID-19 pandemic, as children pursue hybrid or full-time remote learning, the engagement of parents at home is indispensable to enable continuous learning and ensure mental and physical well-being of children.

As evidenced by the recent voluntary national review, parenting education programmes have not yet been widely recognized by governments as conducive to

² World Employment and Social Outlook 2021: The role of digital labour platforms in transforming the world of work International Labour Office, Geneva: ILO, 2021.

³ Parental burnout can be defined as parenting-related stress stemming from a mismatch between the demands of parenting and the resources at parents’ disposal to meet those demands.

the achievement of several Sustainable Development Goals.⁴ Consequently, the importance of parenting education has been emphasized in the recent report of the Secretary-General which recommended to Member States to *“Invest in parenting education programmes in cooperation with families and relevant entities at the national level, as well as with regional and international organizations, civil society and academics and ensure that the programmes are inclusive of grandparents and other relatives raising children; maintain a gender perspective and recognize the role of men in families”*⁵

The 2021 International Day of Families observance is to raise awareness of the importance of such programmes for child and parental well-being and achievement of several SDG targets recognizing that, new technologies may pose challenges but have a great potential to advance parenting education and empower parents for the well-being of their families. The panel discussion will include presentations from academics, civil society and the private sector who will discuss digital technology tools to empower parents and advance parenting education.

Launch of the Background Paper on *“Technology Use and Families: Implications for Work-Family Balance and Parenting Education”*⁶

A major research paper is to be launched at the observance. The paper on *“Technology use and Families”* focuses on the impact of digital technologies on children at different stages in their lives as well as parents and parenting itself. It analyzes several aspects of technology impact on families including equity and access, privacy and online safety as well as digital literacy. The main focus of the

⁴ See Rosario Esteinou “Family-oriented Priorities, Policies and Programmes in the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as Reported in the Voluntary National Reviews of 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019” available at: https://www.un.org/development/desa/family/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2020/05/VNR-PAPER.FINAL_08.05.pdf

⁵ A/76/61-E/2024/4 para 92 (c)

⁶ Susan Walker “Technology Use and Families: Implications for Work-Family Balance and Parenting Education”, UNDESA, 2021, forthcoming.

paper is on work-family balance and parenting education. The keynote address by the author will examine digital technologies and parenting education.

Importantly, the paper emphasizes viewing parenting education as a viable and valuable preventive strategy to reduce child abuse and to support healthy development of children, whether offered alone or as a component of wider family support investments and continuing evidence-informed approaches to parenting education design, delivery and implementation to reach wide audiences, and address child, parenting and parent-child outcomes.

In terms of **technology considerations in parenting education**, technology is seen as a vehicle through which to assist parents and families with learning *how to effectively use and choose technology for their children* (technology as a content area for parenting education) and, as offering tools and a virtual environment *for the delivery of parent education*. Given parents' use of technology for acquiring parenting information, sharing content, and supporting their parenting goals, ICT offers an obvious avenue to reach wider audiences and new methods for effective delivery.

"As parents use technology in their roles as parents – texting and video calls to communicate with children, to reassure and coach their children through challenges, learning alongside with children with education technologies, and sharing the joy of gaming - parenting education can help promote the value and how to use these new media and possibly create new rules for parent-child communication. Finally, parents may need help navigating these spaces as they too can be subject to social comparison, bullying and overuse. When new technologies and workplace policies mean the navigation of flexible work and home time and space boundaries, parenting education can help parents acquire 'digital cultural capital'. "⁷

The objectives of the 2021 observance of the International Day of Families "Families and New Technologies" are as follows:



demonstrate the importance of family-oriented policies and programmes to effectively respond to the challenges posed by the rapid expansion of new technologies;

⁷ Ibid.



present current research on the growing potential of information and communication technologies to empower parents through parenting education tools to benefit families and society at large;



warn of negative impacts of new technologies on children and families;



share good practices in harnessing digital technologies for parenting education and overall family well-being.