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**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Expert workshop on the role of the family and family-oriented approaches, policies and programmes in the promotion and protection of human rights and in sustainable development

Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*

Summary

On 28 and 29 May 2025, the Human Rights Council, pursuant to its resolution 54/17, held an expert workshop on the role of the family and family-oriented approaches, policies and programmes in the promotion and protection of human rights and in sustainable development, to highlight best practices from different regions.

The present report covers the four sessions of the workshop, which were focused on: achieving the full enjoyment of human rights by family members, including achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls; promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all, including early childhood development and education, and ensuring the enjoyment of cultural rights; enabling access to employment opportunities and decent work for parents and caregivers and protecting the rights of those requiring care and support; and ending poverty, ending hunger, ensuring a healthy life and promoting well-being for all at all ages.

* Agreement was reached to publish the present document after the standard publication date owing to circumstances beyond the submitter's control.

I. Introduction

1. On 28 and 29 May 2025, the Human Rights Council, pursuant to its resolution 54/17, held an expert workshop on the role of the family and family-oriented approaches, policies and programmes in the promotion and protection of human rights and in sustainable development, to highlight best practices from different regions.
2. The expert workshop was divided into four sessions. Session 1 was focused on discussing achieving the full enjoyment of human rights by family members, including achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. The expert panellists were: the Adviser to the Minister of Social Solidarity responsible for family, women and children's health and development affairs, Egypt, Randa Fares; the Global Executive Director of Musawah Global Vision Berhad, Samah Hadid; the Director and Representative to the United Nations of the Geneva Advocacy Office of Save the Children International, Michel Anglade; and the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences, Reem Alsalem.
3. Session 2 was focused on discussing promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all, including early childhood development and education, and ensuring the enjoyment of cultural rights. The expert panellists were: the President of Child Rights Connect (and former Chair of the Committee on the Rights of the Child), Mikiko Otani; the Adviser to the Secretary-General of the Family Affairs Council, Saudi Arabia, Haya Zedan; the Ambassador for Gender Equality at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Finland, Katri Elina Viinikka; an Education Specialist at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Mark West; and the International Chief of Treaty Nos. 6, 7 and 8 at the International Organization of Indigenous Resource Development, Wilton Littlechild.
4. Session 3 was focused on discussing enabling access to employment opportunities and decent work for parents and caregivers and protecting the rights of those requiring care and support. The expert panellists were: the Maternity Protection and Work-Family Specialist at the International Labor Organization (ILO), Laura Addati; the Executive Director of the Doha Family Institute, Qatar, Sharifa al-Emadi; the Director of Care at the Ministry of Equality and Equity, Colombia, Natalia Moreno Salamanca; the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, Heba Hagrass; and the Deputy Director of Research at the Equimundo Center for Masculinities and Social Justice, Chloe Lewis.
5. Session 4 was focused on discussing ending poverty, ending hunger, ensuring a healthy life and promoting well-being for all at all ages. The expert panellists were: the Regional Adviser on Social Policy and Economic Analysis at the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, Pamela Dale; a member of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Aslan Abashidze; a member of the China Marriage and Family Research Association, Shi Xin; the Special Rapporteur on the elimination of discrimination against persons affected by leprosy (Hansen's disease) and their family members, Beatriz Miranda-Galarza; the main representative to the United Nations of Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII, Maria Mercedes Rossi; and the Human Rights Coordinator at the European Network on Independent Living, Limited, Rita Crespo Fernandez.

II. Opening

6. In his opening statement, the Chief of the Rule of Law, Equality and Non-Discrimination Branch of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) stated that international human rights law had long recognized that the family was the natural and fundamental unit of society. Effective family-oriented policies and programmes contributed to poverty reduction, the promotion of gender equality and investment in human capital. All families should be spaces in which all family members enjoy their human rights without discrimination.
7. Every member of the family – women, children, persons with disabilities, older persons and LGBTIQ+ individuals – should fully enjoy their human rights at home, without discrimination. Furthermore, dignity and autonomy should be respected in the family. For example, children should be recognized as rights holders independently from their parents, persons with disabilities should be supported to have control over their lives and older

persons' agency and dignity must be upheld within the family. Moreover, all persons should be supported to have a decent living for themselves and their families and empowered to support their members' full enjoyment of human rights by guaranteeing everyone's right to an adequate standard of living, redistribution of unpaid care and support responsibilities in society and the elimination of discrimination against families and their members based on their status. Lastly, the family must be a safe space, free of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation, including child and forced marriage, female genital mutilation and domestic violence.

8. In that regard, States had an obligation to make, in practice, the family a safe space by (a) preventing violence, abuse and exploitation in family contexts and by ensuring protection for victims and survivors; (b) eliminating discriminatory laws; (c) supporting families to live decent lives, by providing social protection, quality public services and decent work, for example through reforms of discriminatory laws; and (d) facilitating family reunifications of migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees, and preventing separation of family members against their will

III. Session 1: achieving the full enjoyment of human rights by family members, including achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls

9. Among the experts there was a consensus that the family had a key role to play in protecting and promoting the human rights of its members from childhood to older age. Families were spaces in which values, such as dignity, equality, solidarity and human rights and related experiences, were shaped and passed on and in which primary protection and support should be provided to its members.

10. For families to play such a role, all experts emphasized that the equal rights of every family member, in particular the equal rights of women and girls, must be respected and protected. It was pointed out that States must address obstacles that stood in the face of the full potential of families, such as structural inequalities, discrimination and harmful norms, and must create effective mechanisms for protection and assistance accessible to women and children that might be at risk.

11. Experts underlined the importance of the role of States in reforming laws, including family laws, to uphold the rights of every person in the family and society, including women and girls, children, older persons and persons with disabilities. It was pointed out that empowering women and girls and upholding religious and cultural frameworks were compatible and that religious interpretations that upheld the rights of women and girls needed to be amplified. In relation to children, the importance of preventing unnecessary separation from the family and promoting family-based alternative care were pointed out.

12. Experts addressed the need to support families. For example, support could be rendered to build the capacity of family members, to break free from stereotypes, promote respect and non-violence and improve legal literacy. Some experts indicated the importance of engaging men and boys in changing social norms, including in caregiving. An example was shared of a programme that involved premarital education that covered gender equality in marriage, conflict resolution skills and how to create a positive and safe environment for children.

13. With regard to children and the role of their parents, it was pointed out that child rights and family support should not be in opposition, as they were interdependent. It was underlined that children must be recognized as individuals, full rights holders within family structures and that every child has a right to be heard, to be protected and supported, irrespective of their family form or caregiver situation. An expert cautioned against the trend of reducing the role of parents from nurturers and educators to mere authority figures, excluded from the solutions and their views sidelined in responding to the challenges faced by their children, for example the online or offline abuse of children.

14. Experts shared examples of the efforts made to promote equality in the family by applying a life-course approach, including cash transfers to promote school attendance and health services; programmes to promote girls' participation in household decision-making; support for diverse forms of families, such as single-women and child-headed households,

and women's economic empowerment initiatives, such as training, grants and entrepreneurship support; child-led advocacy forums and intergenerational dialogues; and empowerment for women to make autonomous decisions regarding family planning.

15. Through interventions from the floor, all States reiterated the crucial role families played in realizing the full potential of family members and the need to ensure that they had their human rights assured. Many States highlighted the family as a natural fundamental element in international human rights law and thus the family was entitled to protection and assistance. States indicated that, in that context, respecting cultural, religious and social diversity was important. Several States claimed that it was essential to recognize the diversity of the family unit outside the traditional or conventional nuclear family. Several States highlighted women as key actors in sustainable development, the need for family-oriented approaches that promoted gender equality and the importance of ensuring women's agency and participation in decision-making processes.

16. Several States emphasized the importance of the family for children. They pointed out that the family was needed for children's development and their protection. At the same time, it was important to protect children from (sexual) abuse within the family, for example through comprehensive sexuality education as a tool to protect children against such violence.

17. States highlighted national examples of laws, practices and policies that guaranteed women's rights in relation to the family in the context of economic empowerment, sexual and reproductive health services, participation and labour conditions. Challenging gender stereotypes and negative social norms within families were also shared as good practices.

18. Many speakers from the floor reiterated that the family was the natural and fundamental unit in society and that States had an obligation to safeguard the rights of all family members. Several speakers indicated that that encompassed recognizing diverse family arrangements, biological and chosen families, same-sex parent families, extended foster care systems and those belonging to Indigenous communities. Other speakers indicated that strong, stable, legal marriages built the emotional, social and economic support to help vulnerable family members.

19. Speakers stated that children must be empowered within the family to influence decisions on matters affecting them, including those related to access to information, and sexual and reproductive health and rights.

20. Speakers indicated that harmful gender stereotypes and social norms might result in inequality within the family, specifically during times of crises. Several speakers stated that States had an obligation to eliminate discrimination against women and girls and gender nonconforming persons within and outside of the family and that States must dismantle legal and social discriminatory structures through inclusive gender-responsive reforms and policies.

21. In their closing remarks, experts reiterated that the family was entrenched in international human rights law and expressed their concern about the targeting and destruction of families in times of conflict. They reiterated that children were rights holders and should not be overlooked.

22. Experts recalled how both legal reform and changing social and gender norms, attitudes and mindsets were important. One expert stated that, while there had been momentum in addressing the reform of family laws, there were examples of serious regression; it was important to remain vigilant against any rollback in relation to the rights of women and girls in the family sphere. Another expert expressed concern about the rollback of the rights of girls, including their protection from violence in digital spaces.

23. Experts stressed the responsibility of States to provide enabling environments that were healthy, just and rights-based for families. One expert stated that an investment in the family was an investment in the future and that States had a legal obligation to protect and respect the human rights of all individuals in families, including by taking action to eliminate all forms of violence, exploitation and neglect in families.

IV. Session 2: promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all, including early childhood development and education, and ensuring the enjoyment of cultural rights

24. There was a consensus that education was a fundamental human right and crucial to sustainable development. Experts indicated the importance of education, from early childhood education to lifelong learning and shared experiences of countries to provide combinations of policies that aimed to ensure early childhood education and care, inclusive education for persons with disabilities and lifelong learning, including for older persons.

25. Several experts stressed the importance of early childhood education and the specific role of the family for children's development. The first years of life represented a critical opportunity for making a positive difference in children's lives, building a foundation for lifelong learning opportunities for all. It was stated that young children's experiences of growth and development were powerfully shaped by culture, beliefs, needs, proper treatment and having an active role in their family and community.

26. In addition to education being a human right, experts pointed out that education was also a powerful tool for building a more equal, inclusive and sustainable society. One expert pointed out that human rights education should not be limited only to school education but must be integrated into the settings of children's everyday lives, in family, school, community and online. It was pointed out that families could play a crucial role in guiding children to exercise their rights, while respecting the views of children, non-discrimination and non-violence.

27. Several experts underscored the importance of recognizing children as rights holders and agents for fostering human rights. In that regard, one expert shared initiatives to incorporate life skills for critical thinking and decision-making in early childhood development. Another expert shared experiences on the importance of recognizing children as active participants and agents in their learning and the collaboration between parents and educators in education, which was based on mutual trust, dialogue and shared responsibility for the child's well-being.

28. The negative impact of education on Indigenous children who had been forcibly placed in residential schools, separated from their families and exposed to violence and abuse, including cultural and spiritual abuse, was highlighted by one expert. He underscored the importance of: recognizing the unique notion of family units of Indigenous Peoples; redress for violations committed in the past; and the respect for international human rights standards that were relevant to Indigenous Peoples.

29. Several experts discussed the power of digital tools in education and their risks. Examples were shared on the positive use of digital platforms to facilitate access to education and cultural resources, such as the virtual kindergarten, a digital platform on culture for children and a digital library. On the other hand, one expert pointed out the risk of digital technologies often focusing too much on capturing the attention of users rather than nurturing human relationships, such as family relationships, and not being age and culturally appropriate for children. It was suggested that families should be more engaged with and empowered in relation to technologies, and that their use in education should be focused more on common and public aims rather than individual and commercial aims.

30. Experts also discussed the importance of promoting lifelong learning, particularly in the current rapidly changing world and the shifts in the way individuals live and work. Experts shared initiatives to eradicate adult illiteracy, remove age limits for university admission and support learning for stay-at-home parents on extended parental leave to return to work.

31. Through interventions from the floor, many States reiterated that the right to education was one of the fundamental rights enshrined in international instruments. Several States shared their views on the importance of a life-cycle approach in education, including through comprehensive education, the inclusion of life skills, and education on transitioning into parenthood.

32. Several speakers highlighted that the realization of the right to education was under stress, for example because of the current underfunding of public education and childcare systems. They also stated how assistance was given to families to assist in their role in relation

to education, for example through social assistance to families with children with disabilities and their educational needs.

33. States also reiterated the role that families played in the development of children, including adolescents. Several States indicated that education was important, for example, in preserving cultural heritage and providing a safe and nurturing environment.

34. It was stated that children and adolescents were full rights holders and should exercise their rights in a manner consistent with their evolving capacities, and that education guaranteed active and significant participation of boys and girls in building their life plan, their own identity and their environment. Several speakers stressed the importance of comprehensive sexuality education as it allowed young people to acquire knowledge and skills that would enable them to form healthy relationships, make informed decisions about their health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights, and contribute to their well-being.

35. Some speakers reiterated the mutually reinforcing connection between cultural rights and education; the transmission of moral and cultural values was related to the best interests of the child. They suggested that States should create participatory platforms for education policies and support schools to offer education aimed at preserving and promoting the cultural, linguistic and religious identities of minorities. One example was shared of laws that were in place for Indigenous communities to access education in keeping with their needs and know-how. Others pointed out that cultural and religious interpretations had been employed to justify harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage, which disproportionately affected girls' education.

36. Some States shared how they were investing in digital technology, offering parents user-friendly family resources and interpretive features that fostered childhood development.

37. In their closing remarks, experts reiterated the importance of cultural, economic and social rights, equality and non-discrimination, and the support needed for families in the context of education through inclusive social protection.

38. Experts recalled the importance of supporting parents in using digital technology to protect and promote the rights of the child. They recognized that some technologies might be more harmful than helpful in educational contexts, while the use of digital technologies could also be useful for education.

39. One expert reiterated the importance of the cultural rights of Indigenous children. Others reiterated the importance of respecting the agency of children in education.

V. Session 3: enabling access to employment opportunities and decent work for parents and caregivers and protecting the rights of those requiring care and support

40. All experts stressed the importance of care and support systems that promoted the rights of those providing and requiring care and support. They indicated that care and support work was foundational to the function of all societies and economies but that it remained undervalued and underfunded. It was also pointed out that family life, work and social protection were under severe pressure.

41. All experts indicated that care and support responsibilities mostly fell on women. Such an unequal distribution of unpaid care and support work limited the opportunities of women and girls to participate in paid and decent work, education and public life and undermined their health and economic autonomy. It was underscored that many care and support workers, particularly migrant, domestic and community health and care workers and those in the informal economy, were not recognized as workers.

42. The need for men and boys to better engage with care and support work was highlighted. Men's wish to contribute more to care and support in the home was being limited by rigid gender norms that perpetuated gender roles within the family and a lack of paid leave for new fathers. At the same time men's involvement in caregiving improved their relationships with their partners and spouses, reduced violence against women and children,

improved children's overall health and well-being and enhanced men's quality of life. All experts agreed on the importance of ensuring gender equality in care and support systems.

43. Experts underscored that care and support system must also uphold the rights, dignity, autonomy and inclusion of those who needed care and support. There were many people – children, adolescents, older persons, persons with disabilities and others – requiring care and support for the vital activities of daily living. It was underlined that persons with disabilities were often seen only as care recipients, yet many of them were also care providers to children or older or sick relatives. It was pointed out that, with rights-based support, persons with disabilities could exercise their rights, live independently and contribute to their societies, including as parents.

44. Experts emphasized the importance of the role of States in transforming care and support systems, by providing and regulating decent work, social protection and public services. Several experts underscored that States should regulate labour standards to guarantee decent working conditions that enabled and redistributed unpaid care and support work. It was pointed out that working conditions that did not enable a life-work balance, such as the lack of flexible working arrangements, maternity leave and childcare services, undermined people's decision to found a family and have children. In that regard, another expert emphasized that States should ensure that all care and support workers enjoy decent work, including through respect for ILO fundamental principles and rights at work.

45. Likewise, experts shared how investing in social protection could address the inequalities in care and support. For example, ensuring maternity protection and care leave, including maternity, paternity, parental and long-term care leave, could address the unequal distribution of care and support by challenging social norms. Moreover, raising awareness of the value of care work could combat its undervaluation; it was important to recognize social protection systems should also recognize unpaid care work. The importance of the role of States in providing universal and inclusive public services, including deinstitutionalization of care services, development of community-based services and social protection that covered assistive devices, home adaptation and accessible transport, was emphasized.

46. Experts shared examples of successful national policies on some of the issues identified, varying from flexible working arrangements, inclusive social protection measures that took into consideration disability-related extra costs, funding for respite care for family members of persons with disabilities, community-based inclusive education, flexible education models that ensured that persons who had care responsibilities could continue their education, capacity-building of men and boys in care and support, and support for persons and collectives who were taking care of the environment, such as water.

47. Several States reiterated how care and support responsibilities mostly fell on women. It was highlighted that family members, along with States, had a shared responsibility in attaining a fair distribution of care and support tasks, thereby promoting gender equality. Some States stressed the importance of a broad, diverse and pluralistic understanding of what families were, such as single-parent households.

48. Several States stressed the importance of economic empowerment in that regard and underlined that striking a balance between work and family life was necessary. Solutions suggested included having flexible working arrangements, such as part-time or remote work, to enable a life-work balance for workers with care and support responsibilities, and capacity-building programmes to help young mothers to maintain and gain access to gainful employment. Several States reiterated the importance of decent work opportunities, including for mothers, fathers and youth to promote gender equality and offer support to families.

49. States shared various examples of the support they gave to families, including through social protection measures. Several States mentioned parental leave, including leave for pregnant women, maternity leave and paternity leave. They also shared how strategic social protection could be used as a tool to redistribute responsibility for care and support among States, families and businesses. Other examples included affordable day-care services and providing a monthly benefit to new mothers in the first year and a half after childbirth.

50. Speakers pointed out that women's dedication to non-remunerated care and support work led to their being excluded from the labour market and receiving a decent income and pension. They called upon States to provide for gender equality in the workplace, for example by reducing the gender wage gap, promoting parental co-responsibility and recognizing and

formalizing unremunerated domestic work and care and support work. They also called for investment in care infrastructure and services, and decent labour conditions for those employed in care sectors, including personal assistants for persons with disabilities.

51. Speakers challenged the idea of persons with disabilities as subjects of care and stressed the need to have community-based support for persons with disabilities and support for the families of persons with disabilities.

52. In their closing remarks, experts reiterated the importance of investing in care and support systems, as that would create decent jobs, give women access to employment and increase the well-being of the general public. Investing in care could further close significant gaps in care services and policies.

53. In response to a question from the floor on why men's involvement in the family was still limited, one expert claimed that that was in large part due to social norms that shaped a man's identity as a breadwinner, which had been internalized by families, employers and States. However, the expert indicated that there seemed to be a move towards easing that pressure and underlined that investing in men's roles within the family had the potential to break cycles of violence and promote gender equality, both within the home and outside.

VI. Session 4: ending poverty, ending hunger, ensuring a healthy life and promoting well-being for all at all ages

54. Experts recalled the key role the family played in society, in reducing poverty and promoting well-being for all. Several experts underscored the importance of preventing family separation. They discussed those issues from the perspectives of children, persons affected by illness, migrants and refugees and persons with disabilities. Some experts also discussed the issue from an overall policy perspective and the need for family-oriented approaches in public policies.

55. It was highlighted that poverty eradication was the primary goal of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and also a matter of dignity and leaving no one behind. Another expert underscored that child poverty was a global phenomenon, affecting not only developing countries but also developed countries. It was also pointed out that poverty was multidimensional and that child poverty locked children into a cycle of intergenerational poverty. Children in female-headed households were 50 per cent more likely to live in multidimensional poverty due to the feminization of poverty, for example as gender stereotypes might prevent women from being actively involved in the economy.

56. Experts shared examples of policies and programmes that supported families living in poverty. One example was to develop a set of policies tailored to poverty reduction on a household basis, by facilitating access to work and a livelihood, education, healthcare and a healthy environment. The effectiveness of public-private cooperation and South-South international technical cooperation were highlighted. With regard to reducing child poverty, key policy tools were inclusive social protection and care systems, universal access to essential services, such as early childhood development, education, healthcare and housing, and decent work for parents.

57. Experts underscored the importance of the family unity and the family environment. One expert stated that stigmatization and the economic, social and mental costs, in the absence of care and support policies, had led to family separation and the breakdown of family relations for persons affected by leprosy – or Hansen's disease – and their families. In that regard, the expert highlighted the importance of the elimination of existing discriminatory laws and the reparation for the historical violation of human rights, including forced institutionalization and family separation, experienced by persons affected by leprosy and their families. Another expert highlighted the importance of providing a family or family-like environment for unaccompanied migrant children in host countries to support their empowerment and integration. In that regard, concerns were expressed about the trend of restrictive migration policies, militarizing border control and limiting access to or criminalizing asylum-seekers. It was stressed that a change of approach, attitudes and narratives was essential to reshaping migration policies for safe and regular migration that respected each human life and the human rights of every person.

58. The importance of independent living for persons with disabilities, as an essential element in ending institutionalization and improving the well-being of persons with disabilities and their families, was discussed. Independent living enabled choice for and control by persons with disabilities over their life and prevented the burnout of family carers. A key tool suggested in that regard was user-led personal assistance. It was highlighted that for such services, funding must be provided according to the needs of persons with disabilities and to enable them to manage the service in terms of by whom, how, when, where and in what way it was delivered. It was suggested that personal assistance could benefit not only adults but also children with disabilities. An expert argued that personal assistance for children would not replace parental care, but would supplement support where needed, so parents could work, attend to their other children or have respite.

59. Recalling that international human rights law recognized that the family was the natural and fundamental group unit of society and was entitled to protection by society and the State, it was highlighted that the interpretation of human rights treaties and international policy frameworks for sustainable development had not adequately addressed the role of the family in poverty reduction and sustainable development. Further study on international and national measures related to the family was suggested.

60. Most States reiterated the important role of the family as a social unit for intergenerational connection and recognized that the economic status of the family affected the nutrition, education, health, opportunities and future abilities of its members, in particular children. Domestic and home-based jobs were increasingly playing a crucial role in economies and there was a need for the necessary infrastructure for those working in such conditions.

61. Gender responsive and family-oriented policies were key to ensuring equitable distribution of care and support, access to employment, education and overall enjoyment of human rights for all. Examples were shared of universal day care, policies on parental leave for all parents and equal pay legislation. Moreover, several States claimed that ensuring access to health services for all, for example through universal medical coverage, was essential for inclusive societies, including for sexual and reproductive health and by way of vaccination programmes.

62. States shared various examples of policies and programmes intended to support families living in poverty, such as free school meals and providing nutritious meals for children and raising awareness of healthy eating, economic empowerment, housing assistance programmes, social assistance programmes for persons with disabilities, older persons and families living in poverty, and financial assistance for families living in rural areas.

63. Speakers stressed that families should be spaces in which human rights and gender equality were upheld. It was stated that, when families were supported with knowledge, resources and inclusive social protection, they became agents of change. It was underscored that States had the primary responsibility to promote and protect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all family members.

64. Several speakers said that it was important to uphold sexual and reproductive health and rights to make sure that people had informed choices about their reproductive health. That included age-appropriate health education for youth about relationships and skills and making sure all family members, including women and girls, had access to sexual and reproductive health services. It was pointed out that for girls specifically, that had the potential to result in equal access to education and equitable distribution of care and support work.

65. Moreover, it was pointed out that the pervasiveness of unequal family laws did not only affect women and girls, but also household economies. It was claimed that discriminatory laws against women and girls might trap women in situations of poverty and result in their exploitation and mistreatment by relatives, partners, employers and the wider society. In that regard, States were urged to take action on discriminatory laws against women and girls.

66. Many speakers indicated that it was important to consider the rights of individuals and their families based on gender orientation and sex characteristics, as diverse families that did not conform to what was considered traditional could often be left out. Families that did not

conform to what was considered traditional could often be left out of poverty-alleviation initiatives because of that lack of recognition.

67. In their closing statements, the experts shared that, despite the broad use of the notion of families in the main international human rights instruments, there was no universally agreed definition of family. One expert stated that that meant that defining the family was a prerogative of sovereign States based on their history, culture, religion and other factors and that States had discretion in recognizing a broader definition of the family, including same-sex families, or recognizing only traditional forms of families. Another expert shared an example of diverse forms of families, referring to the role of extended families in the HIV/AIDS pandemic in caring for the large number of orphans created by the disease.

68. Experts stated that there needed to be political will to address the issue of families living in poverty, in addition to policies that addressed the unique poverty-related issues of families so that no one was left behind. It was highlighted that it was important to empower women in the fight against poverty, for example through microcredits for women entrepreneurs. It was suggested that it was important to collect data to strengthen efforts to reduce poverty.

69. It was recalled that leprosy was not only a medical issue, but also a social and political one. Because of that, the expert underscored that it was important to eliminate laws that denied persons affected by leprosy full citizenship, ensure full participation in the design and implementation of policies and programmes that tackled poverty, provide access to healthcare and treatment, ensure inclusion in the labour market and access to education, and uphold inclusion in care and support systems. Furthermore, it was pointed out that international cooperation and solidarity should be promoted to conduct intersectional approaches to make sure no one was left behind.

70. Lastly, it was emphasized that it was important that the right of all persons with disabilities, including women with disabilities and those in queer relationships, to make their own choices about their lives be defended. It was stressed that poverty was the main driver of institutionalization, as persons with disabilities did not have a real choice to live anywhere but an institution when they could not afford an accessible home, personal assistants or health and rehabilitation services. The expert called for States to allocate resources to independent living centres and personal assistants for adults and children with disabilities and to support families with members with disabilities, including parents with disabilities.

VII. Closing

71. In his closing statement, the Chief of the Rule of Law, Equality and Non-Discrimination Branch emphasized that there was a consensus that the role of families should be recognized and supported to realize the human rights of all family members in full compliance with international human rights standards, and that families were rooted in love, acceptance, care and support. Many also celebrated the diversity of families in the world across cultures, contexts and countries.

72. The workshop participants had underlined the importance of gender equality in the family and expressed concerns about the existing discriminatory laws and practices and rollbacks of the human rights of women and girls, including within the family context. In that regard, speakers had recognized the importance of the reform of family laws and their implementation to advance equality and the equal distribution of care and support responsibilities, respect for sexual and reproductive health and rights in the family and respect for the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons.

73. It had been pointed out that the responsibility of parents to guide their children and children's exercise of their rights and agencies were not in opposition; many had underscored that all children must be recognized as right holders and their right to be heard respected. Parents should nurture and accompany their children and ensure equality between boys and girls, to enable their full exercise of human rights in accordance with their evolving capacities and in their best interests. Likewise, speakers had discussed the importance of respecting the autonomy and agency of persons with disabilities, their independent living within and outside of the family and their right to freedom from institutionalization. Everyone had the right to a family life without discrimination, including migrants who often faced long-term separation from their families.

74. Many speakers had pointed out that the role of family was crucial in passing down cultural identity, while culture and religion must never be misused to justify discrimination. It had been pointed out that families and faith should be advanced as forms and institutions of freedom, not of control.

75. Many speakers had highlighted that access to decent work and social security for all, investment in the care economy and redistribution of unpaid care and support work were key in preventing families and their members from intergenerational poverty and inequality. There was a clear consensus that family space should be free of violence, that families should be empowered and supported to prevent violence in family spaces and, when violence occurred in the family, States had an obligation to protect survivors.

76. While the focus of the workshop was on the role of families, it should be acknowledged that many people had lost their families and many did not have or were separated from their families. Conflicts and disasters were having a devastating impact on families and their members. To ensure that no one was left behind and to realize the 2030 Agenda, human rights-based, gender-responsive and intersectional approaches needed to be adopted to support families and those without families in all settings.
