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What Does the UN Have to Say About Family Policy? Reflections on the ILO, UNICEF, and UN Women

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The United Nations (UN) system is not a monolith by any stretch of the imagination. Insiders often make a distinction between the Secretariat, on the one hand, and the specialized agencies, funds, and programs, on the other, largely based on their sources of funding and modes of governance. A more useful delineation for the purposes of this chapter is what the UN Intellectual History Project refers to as the “3 UNs”—the UN of governments and intergovernmental processes, the UN of staff members, and the UN of closely associated consultants, NGOs, and experts (Jolly, Emmerij, & Weiss, 2009). It is at their intersection that policy ideas—“arguably the most important legacy of the United Nations”—are spawned (Jolly et al., 2009, p. 39). Not only have these ideas shaped global debates on peace and security, human rights, and the international economic framework, they have also offered human rights-based alternatives to the neoliberal worldviews and policy prescriptions of the international financial institutions (IFIs), even if the reaction of the UN to the IFIs can be characterized as “too little and too late” (Jolly et al., 2009, p. 13).

The scope of this chapter is both selective and limited. It considers three entities with mandates that have particular relevance for family policy: The International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment (UN Women). The chapter asks whether the three

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entities have a policy agenda in relation to families, particularly its gender dynamics, and if so, what has its evolution been, and with what inputs from governments, agency staff, and epistemic communities and advocacy networks.

To answer these questions, we need to unpack the meaning of the term policy in the context of international organizations. Policies reside both in the norms and standards they issue, as well as the content of their flagship reports, the pronouncements of their senior leadership, as well as their programmatic work. A comprehensive picture of these agencies would also have to be garnered through a dual focus, both at the level of headquarters (HQ) and in their regional and country offices (“field”) where interactions with governments and other actors shaping policy are most direct. However, due to limitations of space and time, this chapter does not delve into the workings of regional and country offices which would have required significant primary research, keeping its focus on norms and standards, while also referring to flagship publications that articulate agency positions on major policy issues of concern. The extent to which these global norms and flagship reports permeate policy work with governments on the ground is a question beyond the scope of this chapter (but see White in this volume). What this means concretely for each agency is explained in sect. “[What Is Family Policy?](#)” where I also briefly unpack the parameters of family policy. Sections “[ILO: A Labourist and Maternalist Approach to Families?](#)”, “[UNICEF: Children Rights at the Center, Women’s Rights an After-Thought?](#)”, and “[UN Women: Feminist Vision of Families, with an Achilles Heel?](#)” then provide a case by case analysis of the three agencies, before sect. “[Conclusion](#)” concludes.

What I hope the chapter will show is that each agency looks at family policy through its own specific lens, shaped by its mandate and institutional context, which creates considerable continuity in their respective approaches. What this also means is that there is no “one UN” approach to family policy to date and significant room for crafting one that has gender equality at its center. However, continuity does not imply inertia. Agency positions do change, even if at the margins, through their norm-setting bodies as well as more indirectly in response to the “ideas and (non) decisions” (van Daele, 2010, p. 38, cited in Deacon, 2013) of their staff, and their interactions with the epistemic communities (Haas, 1992) and transnational advocacy networks (Keck & Sikkink, 1999) that bring new ideas and make claims.

The ILO, established in 1919 and the oldest of the three agencies, has had the longest-standing engagement with family policy with its focus on labor standards and decent work. This occurred largely through a laborist paradigm concerned with work/family conciliation and social protection, both central

to most definitions of family policy. However, laborism itself has been undergoing important changes with implications for how the ILO sees family policy. Driven by its child-centric mandate, UNICEF has consistently shone a spotlight on children's well-being and rights, but in so doing has arguably left out the needs of working parents, especially mothers who provide the bulk of unpaid care for children. Here too, however, there are signs of incipient change. The youngest of the three, UN Women, has expanded the terrain of family policy beyond core social policies by centering key feminist concerns, such as domestic violence and reproductive rights, while also broaching the highly politicized topic of "diversity" of family forms. Its Achilles heel is that both family policy and social protection have yet to find a strong footing in the organization's programmatic work and strategic plan.

The growing global interest in the care economy, or "care crisis" according to some readings, alongside transformations in gender roles, may account for the recent turn to family policy by both UNICEF and UN Women. While ILO's interest in family policy is long-standing, what seems to be new is its expanded attention to the rights of all citizens or residents, going beyond its core constituency.

What Is Family Policy?

Family policy, as several contributors to this volume suggest, has moveable boundaries. This is especially the case when considering international organizations that work in countries with highly diverse socioeconomic structures and social policy configurations. Two conceptual parameters, proposed by Mary Daly in this volume, are useful in defining the boundaries of family policy. One core consideration of family policy is the *resourcing* of the unit and the individuals that comprise it. This first dimension directs our attention to social policies that have been at the heart of comparative family policy, i.e., public interventions including leaves, social protection transfers such as child and family benefits, and public services such as health, education, and childcare. A second consideration, informed by feminist thought, is the *regulation* of individual behavior and intra-family social relations along gender and generational lines which shape the power dynamics and inequalities within the unit. This delves into the broader legal and institutional context that governs marriage and cohabitation, sexual relations and reproduction, and interpersonal dynamics and intimacies, including issues of violence and bodily integrity that are core feminist preoccupations.

UN agencies per se do not issue global policies since the UN is not a global government. More accurately, some UN agencies, ILO and UN Women among them, have intergovernmental bodies—the International Labour Conference (ILC) and the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), respectively—that adopt normative standards. There are, however, important differences between the norm-setting mechanisms and procedures of the ILO and UN Women. The conventions adopted by the ILC are legally binding international treaties that may be ratified by member states, while the “agreed conclusions” reached by CSW constitute international policy recommendations.¹ In both cases, agency staff—technical experts and bureaucrats—function as secretariats to the norm-setting bodies: they prepare documents and reports, and refine concepts which are then taken to the ILC and CSW for deliberation by government representatives.² In the case of the ILO, its tripartite governance means that government representatives work alongside the representatives of organized labor and employers who sit on its governing body and attend the ILC.

UNICEF does not have a standard-setting body that is equivalent to the ILC or CSW, both of which convene annually. But its work is grounded in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which specifically grants a role to UNICEF for the implementation of the Convention.³ Responsibility for monitoring the enforcement of the CRC by governments that have ratified the Convention or one of its Optional Protocols, however, is undertaken by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, made up of 18 experts in the field of child rights who are nominated and elected by States Parties but act in their individual capacity. Under the CRC, UNICEF can be present when the Committee reviews the implementation of the Convention in a particular country and can be invited to provide expert advice and submit reports.

The organizational footprints of the three agencies are also different. UNICEF has a budget that is almost 10 times that of the ILO and 16

¹CSW is the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. It is a functional commission of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). <https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw>. Accessed 23 Aug 2019.

²While final decisions are made by Member States, the leverage that secretariats have in pushing certain agendas through requires more research, along the lines of Bob Deacon's (2013) fascinating book-length analysis of the adoption of Recommendation 202 on social protection floors by the International Labour Conference.

³This is exceptional; no other UN human rights convention gives an explicit role to a specific UN agency. Although UN Women and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) have a common mandate and collaborate at multiple levels, there is only one mention of CEDAW (reaffirming its relevance) in the General Assembly resolution that founded UN Women (A/RES/64/289), and regrettably no mention of women's rights in the title of the entity.

times that of UN Women.⁴ Given its budget, UNICEF's main advantage, compared to both the ILO and UN Women, is its presence in nearly every country in the world and the support it can give through technical and financial assistance for the implementation of the CRC, as well as the preparation of national reports to the CRC Committee. UNICEF, along with the World Health Organization (WHO), also issues guidelines on various issues related to child well-being and development, including breastfeeding, which has direct relevance for women's rights and family policy as we shall see.

ILO: A Labourist and Maternalist Approach to Families?

ILO's mandate is to strive for a better world of work for everyone. Since its inception in 1919, it has built a system of international labor standards aimed at promoting everyone's rights at work, to ensure that work is performed in conditions of freedom, equality, security, and dignity. The organization's steadfast message during the rocky decades of neoliberal ascendancy and consolidation, globalization, recurrent economic crises, weakened welfare states and the attendant "race to the bottom" in labor rights has been that international labor standards are an "essential component of the international framework for ensuring that the growth of the global economy provides benefits for all" (ILO, 2019a, p. 7). The 2019 report of the Global Commission on the Future of Work reinforces the same principle by proposing "a human-centered agenda for the future of work that strengthens the social contract by placing people and the work they do at the center of economic and social policy and business practice" (ILO, 2019b, p. 11).

As part of this concern for the social side of work, from its early days, the ILO together with women's rights organizations that operated "in its orbit," advanced regulations and policies related to women's work, including with respect to maternity and family responsibilities (Boris, Hoehtker, & Zimmermann, 2018, p. 5).⁵ It was at the first International Labour Conference (ILC) in 1919 that the Maternity Protection Convention (No. 3) was adopted. While the 1919 Convention was limited in scope, only covering women working in any public or private industrial or commercial sector, in

⁴In 2018, UNICEF had a total revenue of 6676 million US Dollars, compared to ILO's total revenue of 708 million US Dollars, and UN Women's 404 million US Dollars (ILO, 2018a; UN Women, 2018a; UNICEF, 2018).

⁵As Boris et al. (2018) observe, the lack of formal status in ILO's governance structure, never stopped international women's rights organizations from weighing in on ILO deliberations.

1952 the revised Maternity Protection Convention (No. 103) extended its reach to include women wage-earner homeworkers and domestic workers. It was also in 1952 that the landmark Social Security Convention (No. 102) was adopted which recognized maternity as one of nine contingencies requiring income protection through social security. The Convention promulgated family benefits and pensions, among others, for employees and their family members, financed through contributory social insurance systems. Further changes were brought about with the adoption of the Maternity Protection Convention (No. 183) in 2000 which broadened the scope of coverage to all employed women, including women employed in atypical forms of *dependent* work.

Two criticisms have been leveled against ILO conventions. The first concerns their differential treatment of women and men, at least historically, which speaks to the regulatory aspect of family policy mentioned above. The granting of special labor “protections” to women, which was prevalent for much of the last century, has been criticized for being discriminatory and for reinforcing the male breadwinner family that was hegemonic at the time. This includes the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which reads “everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for *himself* and *his family* an existence worthy of human dignity...” (Article 23(3), emphasis added). The other alleged shortcoming is the grounding of ILO’s labor standards in an employer-employee relationship, which effectively excludes from their purview the significant cohort of workers, predominantly women, who are either self-employed or who work as contributing family workers on family farms and enterprises. For example, in 2018, 33% of all female employment in sub-Saharan Africa, compared to only 15% of male employment, was as contributing family workers on family farms and enterprises where they often receive no direct pay or remuneration for their work (ILO, 2019d).

Regarding the first charge, although special protections for women workers were prevalent during the early decades of the ILO, by the beginning of the twenty-first century the only convention that applied to women only was the revised Maternity Protection Convention (No. 183). Adopted in 2000, its aim is two-fold: to ensure that a woman’s economic activities do not pose risks to her health and the health of her child, and that childbearing does not compromise the economic security of herself and her family. The Convention also stipulates important minimum standards concerning the occupational

health and safety, duration of leave, the level of payment, and the funding modality.⁶

While woman-specific stipulations are highly discriminatory, the issue of childbirth poses a conundrum. As Sandra Fredman points out, “Substantive equality requires stereotypical expectations in relation to childcare to be dislodged while insisting that pregnancy and childbirth receive specific treatment” (2005, p. 29). ILO conventions have indeed focused on the latter aspect, i.e., the need for special measures to guarantee women’s right to leave and compensation as a result of maternity. However, a crucial cornerstone of a transformative approach is to ensure not only that women are not prejudiced and penalized by pregnancy and maternity, but also that men are included in childcare. In other words, while pregnancy and childbirth are uniquely female, caring and parenting are not. The question is whether ILO standards have gone far enough in transforming care and family responsibilities into a shared endeavor—an issue that various human rights bodies, including the CEDAW Committee as well the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights have also recognized (*ibid.*).

Interestingly, a convention adopted in 1981—the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention (No. 156)—does exactly that. It deals with a broad range of care responsibilities without representing women as the only ones in charge of care. The same broader and gender-neutral approach,⁷ however, was not applied when the ILC sought to revise a “fifty year old instrument on maternity protection” in 2000, for example, by including paternity and parental leave among its provisions as the Nordic delegates to the ILC had insisted (Murray, 2001, p. 39). As a result, the Maternity Convention 2000 continues to deal with “only one set of relationships and one mode of care: the mother/child relationship immediately before and after birth” (Murray, 2001, p. 36), even though the related Recommendation (No.

⁶The duration of leave is stipulated to be no less than 14 weeks, of which 6 are compulsory after childbirth; payment is set at a level that ensures an adequate standard of living for the mother and her child, but no less than two-thirds of prior earnings where under the law cash benefits are based on previous earnings; and the funding source is preferably through compulsory social insurance or public funds, rather than employer liability, in order to prevent discrimination against women in the labor market.

⁷A distinction needs to be made between gender blind and gender neutral. It is well-appreciated that in the context of structural gender inequalities, a gender blind approach can lead to the exacerbation of gender inequalities. Macroeconomic policies, for example, are often designed without specific reference to gender, and hence considered to be gender blind; macroeconomic policies interact with structural features of the economy, such as women’s disproportionate share of unpaid care work and gender segregation of employment, to produce distinct outcomes for women and men (Heintz, 2019). In the context of care for children, as in this example, a gender neutral approach is one that does not assume women to be the default care providers, and hence can support gender equality by involving men in the provision of childcare.

191) of 2000 makes reference to parental leave. However, to its credit, the revised Convention established new grounds of protection which include an explicit guarantee of return “to the same position or an equivalent position paid at the same rate”—an important recognition of women’s strong attachment to the labor market.

This is not to suggest that the ILO—its research, declarations, and pronouncements by senior managers—is still enmeshed in the “worker-mother” norm. In the past few years a number of publications, including *Maternity and Paternity at Work* (ILO, 2014) and the flagship *World Social Protection Report* (ILO, 2018b) have been documenting both maternity and paternity in law and practice. Furthermore, the landmark 2018 publication, *Care Work and Care Jobs*, is emphatic about the crucial importance of redistributing unpaid care within families if equality in the labor market it to be achieved: “No substantive progress can be made in achieving gender equality in the labor force before inequalities in unpaid care work are first tackled through the effective recognition, reduction and redistribution of unpaid care work between women and men, as well as between families and the state” (2018c, p. 38). The same message was boldly stated in ILO’s Centenary Declaration adopted by the International Labour Conference in 2019, calling for “achieving gender equality at work through a transformative agenda,” one that “enables a more balanced sharing of family responsibilities” and “provides scope for achieving better work-life balance” (ILO, 2019c, p. 4).

However, since labor standards continue to be the ILO’s most important governance tool, what they say, and don’t say, has considerable salience. Whether the ILC will seek to revise Convention 183 along the lines of the 2018 report on the care economy, and whether in the current climate of austerity such a revised convention (or recommendation) will endorse equal parental leave for both parents without diluting the crucial guarantees with regard to maternity that Convention 183 has already secured is an open question. However, as the following sections will show, the ILO may need to take some action on this front as other UN agencies move ahead with gender-neutral family leave guidelines.

As for the second charge, of the ILO being ensconced in an outdated employer-employee model, it is important to recognize that the organization has taken huge strides in adapting to the realities of the world of work in the twenty-first century, including the growing prevalence of informal and non-standard work.⁸ This was in great part due to the work of trade unions and

⁸The ILO has had a long-standing interest and engagement with issues of informality; the term ‘informal sector’ was first coined by the ILO in 1972, based on work carried out in Kenya (ILO, 1972).

organizations of informal workers, and a governance structure that provides a space for bottom-up contestations and inputs. The Self-Employed Women's Association of India (SEWA), for example, was pivotal in leading the effort for the adoption of the Homework Convention of 1996 (No. 177), which marked an important breakthrough by recognizing that the home is the place of work for large numbers of women. It is unfortunate that the ratification rate of this Convention remains among the lowest (Boris et al., 2018). The Domestic Workers Convention (No. 189), adopted in 2011, represents another significant step in creating international norms of legal protection for work long thought to lie outside the purview of the ILO.

With regard to family policy more specifically, one of the most significant breakthroughs came in 2012 with the adoption of the Social Protection Floors Recommendation (No. 202) which effectively applies “not only to the 20% of the world's workers who were formal employees but also to 100% of the world's residents” (Deacon, 2013, p. 34). This Recommendation, which enshrines *universal* access to basic income security and essential health care throughout the life course, has taken the ILO beyond its laborist worldview and contributory social protection systems.

With respect to family policy, not only does Recommendation 202 promulgate basic income security for *all* children, *all* persons in active age who are unable to earn sufficient income (due to sickness, unemployment, maternity, and disability) and *all* older persons, by extending coverage beyond the categories of workers falling under the scope of previous conventions, it also “completes and universalizes the principles of maternity protection established by previous instruments” (Addati, 2015, p. 74). In other words, the income security and maternity benefits that are promulgated apply to people performing all kinds of work, whether formal or informal, paid or unpaid—even though there is still no provision for paternity or parental leave, which effectively keeps the “mother-worker” norm intact.⁹

Despite this important breakthrough—revolutionary in the context of ILO—to get Recommendation 202 through the ILC, its scope had to be constantly managed, and the definition of social protection kept under tight reign. Important for family policy, and for women's rights in particular, while both transfers and services could have been included under the umbrella of social protection, this was not done. In other words, the new regulatory

⁹This broader and universal understanding of the ILO's mandate is in line with another important development: under the auspices of the ILO, the 19th International Conference of Labour Statisticians in 2013, re-defined the concept of work to include “activities that are carried out for the production of goods or services for one's own final use or for the final use of others,” thereby bringing all forms of unpaid work, including unpaid care work, under the broad umbrella of work.

regime created through Recommendation 202, left out care services that are powerful enablers of gender equality in the world of work.

In response to the global financial crisis, by fortuitous circumstances,¹⁰ in 2009 the idea of a social protection floor had become part of UN policy through the United Nations System Chief Executives Board (UNCEB), where ILO worked with WHO on item 6 of the action plan, called “social services, empowerment and protection of people.”¹¹ In August 2010, nearly two years before ILC adopted Recommendation 202, a Social Protection Advisory Group was established, chaired by Michelle Bachelet, former president of Chile and at the time, the first Executive Director of UN Women. This advisory group issued its own report in July 2011, entitled *Social Protection Floor for a Fair and Inclusive Globalization* (ILO, 2011), widely referred to as the Bachelet Report. The Report, in line with the UN, reflected a broad understanding of social protection, inclusive of both transfers *and* services, including childcare services that are an important component of family policy.

However, this broad definition did not make its way into the ILC Recommendation in 2012. As Bob Deacon recounts, the worry in the ILO Social Protection Department, which was the acting secretariat to ILC for the drafting of the Recommendation, was that the “prospects of a broad campaign for investment in drains and sewers and much more besides” would disrupt the “narrower and precise focus ... involving only income guarantees and access to health” which the Department thought could make it through the ILC (Deacon, 2013, p. 45). Article 4 of the Recommendation (No. 202) thus reads:

“Members should, in accordance with national circumstances, establish as quickly as possible and maintain their social protection floors comprising basic social security guarantees. The guarantees should ensure at a minimum that, over the life cycle, all in need have access to essential health care and to basic income security *which together secure effective access to goods and services* defined as necessary at the national level.” (emphasis added) (Article 4).

In other words, it is through the guarantee of income security and access to essential health care—the direct objects of the Recommendation—that access to goods and services can be secured. With respect to childcare more

¹⁰Not least, the role that Juan Somavia, the Director General of the ILO, played in winning over a range of UN organizations and international civil society to the concept of a global social protection floor (Deacon, 2013).

¹¹In 2009, UNCEB also established an inter-agency collaboration mechanism on the social protection floors which would continue to coordinate work on social protection across the UN system, bilateral donors, and the Bretton Woods Institutions. The Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board (SPIAC-B) is co-chaired by the ILO and the World Bank.

specifically, on similar lines, the Recommendation specifies the guarantee of income security (i.e., child benefits) without making the provision of childcare services a direct concern: “basic income security for children, at least at a nationally defined minimum level, providing access to nutrition, education, care and any other necessary goods and services” (Article 5b).

While childcare services are left outside of the scope of Recommendation 202, in subsequent years the ILO has given attention to care services, both as a precondition or enabler of women’s employment and as a source of employment. For example, in ILO’s standard-setting work, Recommendation 204 on the transition from the informal to the formal economy encourages (2015) “the provision of and access to affordable quality childcare and other care services in order to promote gender equality in entrepreneurship and employment opportunities and to enable the transition to the formal economy” (Article 21).¹² In its policy work, the ILO has also underlined the importance of regulating the conditions of work in the care sector. This was one of the strongest messages emerging from *Care Work and Care Jobs* (ILO, 2018c). The report provides estimates of the current and projected size of the care sector, and advocates for the feasibility of a “high road” scenario for the sector based on good-quality care employment that promotes gender equality and benefits all involved parties: care recipients, care workers, and unpaid carers. Indicative of the success of this report, the care economy is also featured prominently in the 2019 report of the Global Commission on the Future of Work (ILO, 2019b, p. 28), where it is listed, along with the digital economy and the green economy, as a key site of employment generation that needs to be transformed to create decent work. The same report also refers to parental leave and investments in public care services as crucial areas needed to “foster the sharing of unpaid care work in the home to create genuine equality of opportunity in the workplace” (ILO, 2019b, p. 11).

To summarize, given its mandate to strive for a better world of work, the labor standards issued by the ILC have had a long-standing focus on maternity, and more recently, parental leave as well as social protection transfers, such as family and child benefits. The scope of these standards has broadened over time to include a wider range of workers, and more recently under Recommendation 202, to reach all residents. Care services have also been given increasing prominence lately, both as an enabler of gender equality in the home and in the world of work, and a potential source of present and future jobs. Going against the tide of “private sector solutions” that has swept across the UN system, the ILO has continued to advocate for the regulation

¹²Significantly, article 21 appears under section 5 of the recommendation, which is on rights and social protection.

of care jobs to build a “high road” scenario that benefits all care recipients and their unpaid care providers, and to create quality jobs in the care sector. The “high road” strategy is premised on its capacity to provide *universal* provisions that are adequate and equitable across all social groups—women or men, poor or non-poor, urban or rural, citizen or non-citizen (ILO, 2018c, p. 116).

UNICEF: Children Rights at the Center, Women’s Rights an After-Thought?

With its significant financial and technical presence in low- and middle-income countries, UNICEF has been influential in shaping child-related policy and programming, especially in developing countries. This section briefly considers two specific areas of child-oriented family policy which have considerable bearing on women’s rights and gender equality: breastfeeding and childcare services. Both are issues for which UNICEF has been actively advocating, in the former case, along with WHO and an active civil society network.

It is important to mention that apart from its field-based technical and programmatic work, UNICEF has also played a critical and broader policy role at specific junctures by issuing timely “wake-up calls.” Its 1989 publication, *Structural Adjustment with a Human Face*, was a milestone documenting the devastating impacts on children of structural adjustment policies imposed by the international financial institutions (IFIs) on indebted developing countries (Cornia, Jolly, & Stewart, 1987). Twenty years later, in response to the wave of austerity measures being imposed by the same institutions in the aftermath of the global financial crisis of 2008, a similar call was issued (Ortiz, Chai, & Cummins, 2011), advocating alternative policies to bring about “recovery for all.”

While there are synergies between children’s rights and women’s rights—extensively documented in the 2007 edition of UNICEF’s flagship publication, *State of the World’s Children* (UNICEF, 2007)—tensions and trade-offs also exist that need to be surfaced to inform policy choices, rather than assuming that the synergies are automatic and “what is good for children is also good for women” as the default. Attention to potential tensions is particularly important given the long-standing tendencies and powerful cultural assumptions that have lumped women’s and children’s interests together. Women’s incorporation into welfare systems, for example, has been “strongly influenced by their symbolic and social roles as mothers” (Molyneux, 2007,

p. 2), evident today in relation to child-oriented cash transfer programs that have proliferated across diverse regional contexts, often targeting low-income women in their capacity as mothers. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) itself, which provides the normative foundation for UNICEF's work, has been criticized for stereotyping women as mothers, thereby limiting their life options. With this in mind, this section considers if UNICEF has been able to alter its maternalist lens and see women as actors with their own rights, rather than as a means or "policy conduit" to secure child welfare (Molyneux, 2007).

Exclusive breastfeeding for at least six months, was the key message of the 1990 Innocenti Declaration on the Protection, Promotion, and Support of Breastfeeding, which came out of a WHO/UNICEF policymakers' meeting on "Breastfeeding in the 1990s," a global initiative, held at the Innocenti Center in Florence in 1990. The message has been forcefully sustained not only through the Global Strategy for Young Child Feeding, jointly developed by WHO and UNICEF (2003), but also by an active global network of individuals and organizations dedicated to the protection, promotion, and support of breastfeeding worldwide, called World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA).

The Global Strategy, as it declares in its preface which is signed by the directors of the two organizations, is based on "the evidence of nutrition's significance in the early months and years of life" (WHO & UNICEF, 2003, p. 5). Lack of breastfeeding, it continues, "and especially lack of exclusive breastfeeding during the first half-year of life" constitute "important risk factors for infant and childhood morbidity and mortality that are only compounded by inappropriate complementary feeding" (p. 5). The life-long impacts include "poor school performance, reduced productivity, and impaired intellectual and social development" (p. 5). The "call for action" urges governments, international organizations, and others to provide "mothers and families the support they need to carry out their crucial roles" (p. 6).

The 2003 Strategy declares "mothers and babies" to be "an inseparable biological and social unit" (p. 3), with directives that at times border on compulsion, "The vast majority of mothers can and should breastfeed" (p. 10), as well as blaming mothers for uninformed feeding practices that result in child malnutrition. References to women's employment are largely negative: "Expanding urbanization results in more families that depend on informal or intermittent employment with uncertain incomes and few or no maternity benefits" (p. 6). The document displays little recognition that women in many low-income families need to earn an income, let alone any

mention of the empowering potential *for women as women*, of having an income of their own. There are references in the Strategy to the ILO Maternity Protection Convention (No. 183) and the need for “day-care facilities and paid breastfeeding breaks” for all women employed outside the home. The ILO standard of at least 14 weeks of leave, however, is hardly enough to cover six months of exclusive breastfeeding that is called for. During the negotiation of the ILO Convention on maternity (No. 183), WHO and UNICEF, as “observers” at the ILC, had voiced a strong preference for six months of maternity leave, and to this day they continue to advocate for paid maternity leave for a minimum of 18 weeks, which is in line with ILO Maternity Protection Recommendation (No. 191), and preferably, for a period of six months, along with “paid paternity leave” to add some gender balance.¹³

Another critical area of intersection between children’s rights and women’s rights is with regard to early childhood education and care (ECEC) services. International organizations were not active players in the field of ECEC until the 1970s, and initially they were only interested in pre-school education; children under three were assumed to be cared for at home by their mothers (Mahon, 2016). However, in recent decades ECEC has moved to the center of global policy debate, given its fit with the contemporary discourse on the “knowledge-based economy” and as part of the push-back to the harsh neoliberalism of the 1980s (Mahon, 2016). A handful of International Organizations, most notably the World Bank, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) as well as UNESCO and UNICEF, have framed ECEC for a global audience, drawing selectively on Northern-based research by neuro-scientists, economists and pedagogues to persuade governments in low-income countries to invest in early childhood, given its “high returns” and “in the interests of competitiveness” (Penn, 2019, p. 7).

While there is broad-based agreement on the importance of ECEC, there are differences among these major players in how they frame the issue—for some it is a social right while for others it constitutes an investment in human capital; there are also salient differences among them in terms of preferred modalities of service provision—formal and universal programs versus non-formal community programs targeted to the poor (Mahon, 2010, 2016; see also Vandembroeck in this volume). For our purposes another important divide is between those looking at ECEC largely from the perspective of child development and those looking at it from the perspective of adult women’s rights, both as unpaid care providers in families *and* as childcare workers in the delivery of ECEC services.

¹³UNICEF Executive Director Henriette H. Fore and WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, World Breastfeeding Week, 2019 Message.

Not surprisingly, policy interventions in this area are often framed in terms of “the best interest of the child” to promote and optimize children’s health and cognitive development. Gender equality and the rights of adult women—whether as unpaid family caregivers or childcare workers staffing ECEC programs—are all too often an after-thought (Staab, 2019). While the availability, affordability, and quality of childcare services, including their location and opening hours, are pivotal for women’s ability to access paid work, ECEC services are not often designed with women’s needs and aspirations in mind, though there are enough examples to show that it can be done. Apart from Nordic countries where children’s rights and development have been center stage along with strong public support to promote gender equality (Mahon, 2016), there are also a handful of developing countries where efforts are being made to gradually transform ECEC provision in ways that respond to women’s rights. In both Chile and Ecuador, for example, efforts have been made to up-grade service quality and adjust the schedules of childcare centers to better respond to the needs of working parents, and to improve the employment conditions and wages of their predominantly female staff (Staab, 2019).

UNICEF has been an avid advocate of early childhood development programs, largely from the perspective of child development, combining human rights and social investment discourses. While in its 2007 flagship report, childcare responsibilities were recognized as a constraint on women’s labor force participation, it is not clear if this translated into “a focus on high-quality, center-based childcare services in the organization’s programming efforts on the ground” (Staab, 2019, p. 75). Earlier research suggests that at the country level, UNICEF’s interventions have tended to promote home- and community-based programs aimed at strengthening parenting skills for children under three, thereby spreading its efforts “wider but more thinly” (Penn, 2004, p. 25), while for three to six-year-old children it has supported ECEC services to enhance school readiness (Staab, 2019).

In July 2019 UNICEF launched a “family friendly” policy initiative which seems to signal something of a breakthrough, as it finally links its concern with child development to the needs of working parents. A series of evidence briefs—on paid parental leave (UNICEF, 2019a), childcare services (UNICEF, 2019b), child benefits (UNICEF, 2019c), and especially women’s economic empowerment (UNICEF, 2019d)—strongly connect to the needs of working families, especially working women in low-income households, in the context of a “global crisis of care” and cognizant that care responsibilities often “compromise women’s economic empowerment” (UNICEF, 2019b, p. 1). There is recognition of the gendered effects of

time-related policies, and that “long maternity leave, with no commensurate paternity/parental leave, may reinforce the gendered division of care work within the home” (UNICEF, 2019d, p. 3). The brief on child benefits also raises the concern that conditionalities attached to child benefits may reinforce gender stereotypes while adding to women’s unpaid work, and hence articulates a preference for making child benefits universal and unconditional (UNICEF, 2019c, p. 3). Referring to the integrated nature of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), there is a call for action to connect the targets on early childhood programming (4.2), with valuing and supporting unpaid care work (5.4) and promoting decent work for all (8.5) (ibid.).¹⁴

It is too early to gauge whether the “family friendly” approach has filtered down to UNICEF’s programming on the ground. The briefs foresee a major role for publicly funded childcare services because “private childcare remains expensive and restricts women in low-income families from engaging in the paid economy,” while employer-led and employer-funded care services are considered less desirable because they are likely to put a strain on small- and medium-sized enterprises where the majority of women workers are located, thereby restricting coverage (UNICEF, 2019b, p. 5).

However, in the current climate of austerity, criticized by UNICEF for being short-sighted and misguided, a major expansion in public provisioning will need strong advocacy and support from UN agencies including UNICEF, not least vis-à-vis the international financial institutions that weight-in heavily on developing country governments, urging them to slash public expenditure. In the meantime, an “employer supported childcare” model is being advocated by the International Finance Corporation (IFC) of the World Bank Group. The IFC has been advising companies on how to improve work-family balance for their employees, as a means of attracting and retaining qualified staff and talent—“making the business case” (IFC, 2017), as the current lingo frames it. This is a far cry from childcare as a public good, available to *all* children as a right, regardless of family income

¹⁴The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted in September 2015, by 193 UN Member States, tackles a broad range of global challenges, aiming to eradicate poverty, reduce multiple and intersecting inequalities, address climate change, end conflict and sustain peace. It is comprised of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Goal 5, for example, is dedicated to gender equality and includes among its 9 targets a specific target (5.4) on recognizing and valuing unpaid care and domestic work. Goal 4, which is on quality education and life-long learning, includes a specific target (4.2) on quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education, while Goal 8 which is on economic growth and employment includes a specific target (8.5) on full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, and equal pay for work of equal value (see UN, 2015).

and parental employment status, and risks creating highly uneven and fragmented provision, reinforcing existing inequalities and leaving most informal workers and their children stranded.

To summarize, UNICEF has indeed seen families through the prism of child welfare and development, while women have invariably figured in maternal roles, responsible for breastfeeding and ensuring their children's nutritional and health needs. Through its extensive field presence, UNICEF has been supporting early childhood development through improved nutrition, breastfeeding, parenting programs, and play-based interventions rather than concerning itself with the needs of working parents through quality childcare provision. The recent turn to "family friendly policies" marks a breakthrough, responding to changed material circumstances—a "global care crisis" and women's increasing breadwinning roles—signifying a belated recognition that adult women too are right-holders. The extent to which UNICEF is able to connect children's right with women's rights in its programming remains to be seen, which is where it can make the biggest difference, but also where bureaucratic inertia and resistance are likely to be greatest. Rights-based universal ECEC services that meet the needs of working parents "allow mothers to work outside the home with tranquility and include women educators who become professionals, receive decent salaries, work in adequate places and produce good care for children" (Rosemberg, 2006, p. 82, cited in Mahon, 2010) must also confront the straightjacket imposed by fiscal austerity and the continued faith in private sector solutions and the "business case."

UN Women: Feminist Vision of Families, with an Achilles Heel?

UN Women was created in July 2010 by the United Nations General Assembly to consolidate and strengthen the global drive for gender equality, and address the challenges posed by the fragmentation of responsibilities for gender equality across four different offices. The four predecessor offices that were merged into UN Women in 2010 included the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) which acted as the Secretariat to the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), already referred to in sect. "What Is Family Policy" above; the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM); the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI); and the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW). For

our purposes the most relevant are DAW and UNIFEM, since they were responsible for the bulk of normative and operational work on gender equality.

Despite the role of UN Women's first Executive Director, Michelle Bachelet, in chairing the Social Protection Advisory Group (see Section "ILO: A Labourist and Maternalist Approach to Families?" above), there is no reference to UN Women in its 2011 Report. In the preface to the report, Juan Somavia, the Director General of the ILO at the time, explains how Bachelet's "achievements in successfully extending social protection in Chile where significant investments were made to enhance access to health, pensions, education, housing, water and sanitation, and especially to promote child development and improve gender equality" stand her in good stead as chairperson of the Social Protection Advisory Group.

There is little evidence, however, that the findings of the Report were brought back to UN Women. Why did the Bachelet Report not have any ripple effects within UN Women in a context where women persistently shoulder the lion's share of unpaid care and domestic work, comprise 65% of those above retirement age without a regular pension, and either juggle or miss out on employment opportunities because of a dearth of affordable care services and basic infrastructure to reduce the drudgery of domestic work?

Family policies—especially work/family conciliation through maternity and parental leave, investments in care services and social protection transfers—were not prominent themes in the work of DAW, with one important and significant exception. The 53rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW-53), which convened in March 2009, broached critical areas of family policy in the context of its priority theme, "The equal sharing of responsibilities, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS."¹⁵ This was a significant moment, as it was the first time that the issue of care was being placed on the agenda of CSW. The devastating consequences of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, especially for women and girls in Sub-Saharan Africa, had catapulted the issue of care onto the global agenda. In preparation for the session, as per usual practice, DAW convened an expert group meeting, inviting a range of external experts, many of them prominent feminist academics working on the topic (e.g., Mary Daly was the author for the background paper of that meeting), as well as relevant "sister agencies," including the ILO and the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) to present their work. The Secretary General report

¹⁵The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) adopts a multi-year program of work containing what are called the 'priority theme' for discussion and action for its annual sessions that take place in March in New York.

on the priority theme was drafted by DAW staff drawing on the expert papers and UN agency inputs.

The agreed conclusions of CSW-53 made copious references to the “equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men” for the care of persons, which strategically went beyond persons with HIV/AIDS to include both children and older persons as well (UN, 2009). The ILO Convention that was “duly noted” was Convention 156 on the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men. In terms of policies, the agreed conclusions referenced a range of “family friendly policies” including maternity, paternity, and parental leave as well as “campaigns to sensitize public opinion and other actors on equal sharing of employment and family responsibilities between women and men.” Social protection measures, including child and family allowances, and affordable, accessible and quality care services for children and other dependents, were also emphasized while underlining the need to ensure that such services meet the needs of both caregivers and care recipients. Investment in infrastructure, such as clean water, constituted another prominent theme, given its relevance in the context of caring for people with HIV/AIDS in many low-income communities. Many of these issues would resurface in later years after the creation of UN Women, as will be shown further below, including in the 2030 Agenda under target 5.4 (unpaid care and domestic work).

Nor was family policy a familiar terrain for UNIFEM. Its main areas of programmatic work included ending violence against women; governance, peace and security; and strengthening women’s economic capacities and rights (UN, 2000). In 2000, the first issue of UNIFEM’s flagship report, *Progress of the World’s Women* (*Progress* for short), was launched focusing on women’s economic empowerment in the context of globalization (UNIFEM, 2000). Authored by the prominent feminist economist Diane Elson, the report provided a “more complete view of how economies work” (p. 7), including a focus on unpaid care work and volunteer work done in homes and communities, and invisible informal paid work done in small workshops and on the streets. Another prominent theme in the report was the need for governments to be accountable to women for public expenditure (UNIFEM, 2000). Work on gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) as an instrument with which to scrutinize budgetary allocations from a gender perspective, was already underway in some countries. After the launch of *Progress*, it became one of the signature programmatic areas of UNIFEM. The work on economic rights focused on the informal economy while criticizing the structural adjustment policies that were devastating women’s livelihoods.

Social policy and family policy, however, seem to have fallen through the cracks, perhaps on the faulty assumption that they were more relevant for high- and middle-income countries, than the low-income and fragile countries that most concerned UNIFEM and its donors.¹⁶ In subsequent years, research by a number of UN agencies, including the ILO and UNRISD, as well as prominent research networks has shown the relevance of social policies to all countries, including low-income ones, as an enabler of development, and not something that countries can only afford to do once they have developed.¹⁷ The lack of attention to social policy and family policy may have also had deeper roots in the “women in development” thinking that associated social policies with a “welfarist” approach that feminist advocates were keen to eschew (Razavi & Miller, 1995). Whatever the reason, UNIFEM’s work on women’s economic rights remained squarely focused on women’s paid work, especially in the informal economy.

Hence, when UN Women was created in 2010, with Bachelet at its helm, there was limited on-going work or expertise in the organization on social protection to seize the opportunity presented by the Bachelet Report. Furthermore, as the first executive director of a brand-new organization, Bachelet had the formidable task of making a new organization viable. The reluctance to bring the work on social protection into UN Women may have also been due to what one observer refers to as a “legacy problem, meaning the organization (and its staff) sticking to inherited priorities from the four predecessor offices,” and being reluctant to take on emerging issues, especially those relating to structural causes of gender inequality. It took another five years before the theme of social protection, including family policy, resurfaced, this time in the 2015 issue of *Progress of the World’s Women*, focusing on transforming economies for gender equality by anchoring both macroeconomic *and* social policies in human rights (UN Women, 2015).

Under social policy, the report included paid leave (both maternity and parental); social protection transfers, preferably in the form of unconditional and universal child and family benefits and universal pension systems; and adequate investment in a range of public services, including early childhood education and care services and long-term care. In line with human rights principles, the need to ensure the accessibility, affordability, and quality of

¹⁶Personal communication with Anne-Marie Goetz (28 August 2019), chief of the Women, Peace and Security Section at the time of UN Women’s creation, and previously leading the same area of work in UNIFEM.

¹⁷The case was made most persuasively by the UNRISD research programme on ‘Social Policy in a Development Context’ which showed how historically social policies were an important enabler of development both in the Nordic countries as well as in East Asia (Mkandawire, 2001).

services was underlined, along with decent conditions of work for service-providers. At a broader level, a key message of the report was the need for economic and social policies to work in tandem, seeing both unpaid care services performed in the home and paid care services as “investments” in human capabilities that contribute to economic productivity and dynamism (see also Heintz, 2019).

Almost in tandem with this issue of *Progress*, family policies, such as paid leave, child, and family allowances and in particular the urgent need for governments to invest in care services, also started appearing in the priority theme reports and agreed conclusions, of CSW, especially CSW-58 which took place in 2014 and reviewed the achievements and challenges of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as a precursor to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and CSW-61 in 2017 which had women’s economic empowerment in the changing world of work as its priority theme (UN, 2014, 2017).¹⁸ The reconciliation of paid work and care responsibilities, the sharing of family responsibilities, and the urgency of investing in social protection systems and care services were important themes in CSW-58 which paved the way for the inclusion of care in the 2030 Agenda.

The most in-depth treatment of family policy by CSW took place in March 2019, when the priority theme was specifically on social protection systems, access to public services, and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality (UN, 2019). Not only did the Commission recognize the importance of relevant ILO standards, it specifically referred to Recommendation 202 on social protection floors in its preambular paragraphs. Investment in accessible, quality, and affordable early childhood education and care services was recognized as crucial in enabling women to enter and remain in the labor market (UN, 2019, para. 19). Another important contribution was the emphasis it placed on the interlinkages between social protection systems and public services and the need for the two to be better integrated. This is particularly important at a time when child-oriented cash transfers—one specific instrument of social protection—are given considerable policy attention and donor funding, while adequate investment in care services, arguably a far stronger enabler of women’s labor force participation and economic autonomy, elude most countries and donor priorities.¹⁹

¹⁸Within UN Women, the Intergovernmental Support Division (IGSD) assumes the main secretariat function to CSW as well as other intergovernmental processes. The substantive part of the function, which includes the preparation of Secretary General (SG) reports on the priority theme of CSW each year, is mostly assumed by the technical experts in the Policy Division. The SG reports for CSW 61 and 63 drew on the 2015 Progress of the World’s Women report.

¹⁹There are well-known feminist concerns about the conditional cash transfer schemes: the conditionalities attached to the transfers tend to reproduce traditional gender roles and aggravate the unpaid

Building on this body of work, the 2019 issue of *Progress* focused squarely on the theme of families in a changing world, advocating for a “family-sensitive” policy agenda. There are two important elements in this report: first, drawing on the latest available global data it demonstrates the diversity of family forms; and second, it proposes a comprehensive family policy agenda from a feminist perspective.

The first element is in many ways novel and addresses a major lacuna in global reports and policy discussions. At the same time, it responds to contentious political debates, including among Member States that attend CSW, on the diversity of family forms which sees right-wing populists internationally aligned with conservative religious interests in defense of the so-called “natural family” (Goetz & Irani, 2019). With this report UN Women boldly interjects in this debate by providing rigorous empirical evidence to show that families are indeed diverse everywhere (and thus need to be resourced), while the two-parent household with children, assumed to be the “norm,” only makes up 38% of all households globally. Family policy therefore needs to respond to the diverse realities of family life which include single-person, single-parent, extended as well dual-parent households, including same-sex partnerships—requiring a major regulatory adaptation if family policy and the resourcing of families is to respond to the reality of how people are living their day to day lives.

The second element brings together the policy analysis already done by UN Women under the theme of social protection and care systems. However, not only did the family-friendly policy package include leave policies (maternity and equal parental leave), transfers (universal child benefits and pensions) and care services (early childhood education and care, and long-term care)—the usual components—it also embraced key feminist issues that are not often included under family policy or social policy (Shaver, 1994). These include policies and measures needed to prevent and respond to domestic violence, and policies to guarantee sexual and reproductive health and rights, including comprehensive sexuality education. The last two elements were important additions from a feminist perspective, given their salience to women’s human rights. The 2019 report also includes a costing exercise to show that the proposed policy package is affordable for most countries—and not something that only high- and middle-income countries can do.

While the steady rise of family policy in UN Women has been impressive, it has an Achilles heel. UN Women’s work on social protection and family policy is yet to find a secure footing in the organization’s programmatic work

care work that women already perform (Molyneux, 2007), while also exposing them to discrimination and coercion by programme staff (Cookson, 2018).

and strategic plan. At the time of writing, much of the work and the expertise, remain in the organization's research and normative sections, at the HQ level. However, for the issue to gain traction, especially at the country level, it needs to be translated into programmatic interventions, which is also where funding goes. The fact that both social protection and unpaid care work are visible components in the 2030 Agenda—under Goals 1 and 5, respectively—means that there are likely to be openings for Country Offices to pursue such work, especially if there is funding to support it and if UN agencies with the relevant mandates are able to work together.

At the ideational level, the care economy provides a more comfortable framing for some elements of family policy—most notably investments in childcare services—to gain traction in UN Women. The fact that investments in care services are seen as “productive”—enabling women's labor force participation—provides an easier fit with the “women's economic empowerment” mindset that remains dominant in the organization. In fact, following the publication of UN Women's first flagship report on SDGs that showcased care policies (UN Women, 2018b) several UN Women Country Offices have been costing early childhood education and care services, including the returns on investing in them, to persuade governments to take steps in this direction. Social protection, however, may still be regarded as smacking of “welfarism,” even if there is considerable analytical work persuasively showing that it is “productive” (Cichon & Scholz, 2006; Mkandawire, 2007)—an argument that UN Women reports, including *Progress*, have also made.

To summarize, while family policy may not have been an area of work for UNIFEM and DAW, and hence for UN Women at the time its first Executive Director issued the Bachelet Report, in the last six years it has become a visible area of concern, both at CSW and in UN Women's major reports. The reasons for the increasing prominence of the theme is twofold. First and foremost, both social protection and the care economy, which draw attention to family policy, have seen a meteoric rise over the past decade, thanks to the epistemic communities and advocacy networks that have framed the issues for policy audiences. Second, having insiders is also helpful, to seize political opportunities, to domesticate key elements of the social protection and care agenda as relevant for family policy, and make it visible through reports and publications. As a feminist organization, UN Women has expanded the scope of family policy to include not only the issue of domestic violence and reproductive rights, but also has taken on the highly contentious issue of diversity of family forms. These positive developments notwithstanding, this section also raised a question about its uncertain status as a long-term strategic commitment and driver of its programmatic work. It was suggested that in

UN Women the care economy, more so than social protection, provides the best ideational framing for family policy.

Conclusion

Policies that can support families in all their diversity, recognize women's rights and embed gender equality are critical for social and economic development everywhere, even though the policy instruments needed to do so will vary depending on the specificities of labor markets, livelihoods and state capacity. To answer the question posed in the title of this chapter, there is no one family policy at the UN, but different policy approaches pursued by different UN entities, reflecting their respective institutional mandates and histories. As we have seen, there is considerable path-dependency in how different UN agencies approach family policy. But there is also learning and cross-fertilization, evident in the way in which issues of care and social protection have reverberated across the system. The recent turn to family policy, with issues of gender, social protection and care at its center, across the three entities, responds to both material and ideational changes: women's changing roles, a perceived crisis of care, and women's claim-making for equality and rights. UN agencies are also porous: transnational networks and epistemic communities have been able to frame family issues as compelling policy problems, while staff have domesticated them through research products, normative, and policy work.

The fact that these issues have also made their way into the 2030 Agenda provides an anchor for a sustained focus on key elements of family policy. The chapter has also indicated two concrete issues that require attention: the ball is now in ILO's court to issue gender-neutral guidance on family leave, but without losing the guarantees for maternity leave that Convention 183 has secured; care services, particularly for children under three, remain orphaned but are too critical and could benefit from more systematic coordination between all three agencies to ensure that they work for children, their parents and care workers.²⁰ Attention to long-term care services for frail elderly persons is another urgent family policy issue with significant gender implications, as women make up the bulk of those needing care and providing care (both paid and unpaid).

The 2030 Agenda provides a common frame and point of reference, urging UN agencies to connect the dots and think about the issues in an integrated

²⁰UNESCO's mandate covers pre-school education, usually for children aged 3 and above, until school age.

way. The focus on synergies and interconnections is a boon for thinking about family policies. At the same time, there is also an on-going process of UN reform which is urging different parts of the system to work together more effectively, overcoming the territoriality around mandates, in order to better support countries to meet the SDGs. The SDGs are broad goals or desirable destinations, but without the policy roadmaps needed to get there. This is where UN agencies can step in to provide guidance to countries, and “best practices,” to inform policy choices. Family policies also need financing, which makes it a difficult proposition at a time when austerity looms large. In this context, private sector provision and finance may seem luring, but history tells us that market-based solutions are unlikely to provide the kind of universal social and family policies that can reign in gender, class, and other intersecting inequalities.

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