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# Investing in family cohesion as a development factor in times of crisis

**Report**
Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee
Rapporteur: Mr Luca VOLONTÈ, Italy, Group of the European People's Party

*Summary*

The current economic crisis has undoubtedly created a generally unfavourable social environment for most families all over Europe. Changing demographics, low birth-rates, population ageing and increasing women's participation in the workforce are some of the factors which are driving the need for societies to invest in human capital by adopting dynamic family policies.

The Parliamentary Assembly takes the view that a comprehensive family policy should be a core priority for each Council of Europe member state, linking income, childcare facilities, gender equality, education, social and cultural services, intergenerational solidarity, employment, infrastructural provision and urban planning.

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## A. Draft resolution

1. There are wide-ranging discussions and predictions about the implications of the global economic downturn for social policies and social relations. Significant amongst the concerns raised is the potential negative impact of the current economic crisis on families and family relationships and the associated well-being of both adults and children.

2. The Parliamentary Assembly recognises the force that the family represents in meeting life's challenges and considers that families are fundamental resources for the recovery of the economic system, especially during times of adversity and change. The family produces assets and factors for development. Peace, stability, cohesion and solidarity, child-rearing, informal services and assistance, care, freedom and responsibility, well-being, savings, economic stability and inter-generational solidarity are some of the countless and often unnoticed spiritual virtues and material benefits that accrue from family cohesion.

3. The Assembly believes that families are generally best placed to deal with life's events and take decisions suited to their specific circumstances. The family should be the first port of call, shouldering the corresponding responsibilities. However, this optimum position for coping with problems differs from family to family, and not all families always require the same level, type and logic of support. Confidence in the reliability of families is a vital element of the social fabric.

4. Against a background of changing patterns of family constitution and dissolution, cuts in essential public services, high unemployment rates, rising debt levels and demographic changes, the Assembly believes that governments can operate effectively only if they can count on trustworthy and stable family relationships. In times of social upheaval and economic crisis, governments too often expect families alone to become "social shock-absorbers", through the internal solidarity between their members.

5. The Assembly takes the view that changing demographics, low birth rates, population ageing and increasing women's participation in the workforce are some of the factors which are driving the need for societies to invest in human capital by adopting dynamic family policies. A growing consciousness of the lifelong impact on a child's future of inadequate or unstable care should also remain a key concern for policymakers. They also have to consider how they can improve social and economic policy arrangements for the family and prepare fertile ground for the fulfilment of the desire to have children.

6. The Assembly considers that it would be simplistic to say that family policies are limited solely to financial benefits. Governments must remain alert to the impact of social policies in respect of the family, working for phased co-ordination of their policies so that they may become "family-friendly". To this end, the Assembly encourages the member states of the Council of Europe to give consideration, as appropriate, to the following:

6.1. promoting men's involvement in and solidarity with family life and household duties, with due regard for the principle of both parents' joint responsibility for the upbringing and development of their children: awareness-raising campaigns and positive legal measures relating to a new family culture should be promoted in order to enable fathers to shoulder their responsibilities vis-à-vis their children;

6.2. encouraging the reinforcement of stable relationships, according to Article 12 of the European Convention on Human Rights, and of other social arrangements based on reciprocity, equality and freedom;

6.3. providing families with adequate support, when necessary, on the ground that they are a social asset which generates important benefits for society;

6.4. paying particular attention to young people's access to stable jobs, affordable housing and other types of social support so that they are able to start families and raise children in a safe and caring environment; developing social housing programmes especially targeted at young couples and at large families;

6.5. supporting inter-generational relationships within the family: consideration should be given to older people who support their families financially and/or in other ways, for instance by looking after their grandchildren. Provision should be made not only for childcare, but also for care of frail elderly people on the grounds that high-quality, affordable and reliable facilities and services make it possible to reconcile gainful employment, care work and family life;

6.6. tackling social exclusion, disruptions and poverty, particularly of lone-parent families, families at risk, large families and migrant families. Discussions on different family models should focus on the consequences of divorce for children, including the risk of poverty, school failure, unemployment and other forms of social exclusion;

6.7. promoting the right to family reunification of third country nationals lawfully residing on the territory of a Council of Europe member state, as recognised by several international and European legal instruments, so as to facilitate their social, economic and cultural integration with positive effects on the host society;

6.8. focusing on children in disadvantaged or dysfunctional families as a consequence of family breakdown: the increased risk of poverty among children in single-parent families is found to be reinforced by disadvantage at school, as well as poorer health and housing outcomes. These children are more likely to be exposed to risks that jeopardise their educational achievement, which then affect their future prospects;

6.9. reconciling work and family life by promoting family-friendly workplaces for women and men: quality care, flexible working arrangements, suitable forms of parental leave and other types of care that are necessary, not only for young children but also for other family members as a result of disability, old age or illness, and other modes of financial support by means of allowances or tax relief, remain critical. These measures must address women and men, as currently flexible employment policies have a higher take-up rate among women, which in reality perpetuates the gender divide between paid and unpaid work and impacts on women's decisions to have or not to have children;

6.10. providing families with high-quality services at affordable prices, especially through public and non-profit making structures: parents need to have access to affordable childcare of various kinds, such as all-day for pre-school children, after-school care for children of school age, meeting the needs of children with special needs, in particular sick and disabled children. Integrated child care services, such as child care at home, in firms and at the workplace should also be further encouraged;

6.11. engaging the private sector, in terms of corporate social responsibility and adapting legislation by introducing flexible working arrangements for both the father and the mother, to facilitate a more balanced sharing of roles, that is to say, to relieve women of the double burden of employment and domestic duties, while encouraging men to take an active part in family life.

**B. Draft recommendation**

1. The Parliamentary Assembly refers to its Resolution … (2010) on "Investing in family cohesion as a development factor in times of crisis" and recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

1.1. forward this resolution to the governments of member states and request them to take it into account when developing their national family policies;

1.2. promote an exchange of best practices between member states on family policies and invite the competent departments of the Council of Europe to:

1.2.1. promote a more strategic interaction among different areas of work and a multidisciplinary approach to family questions across the Organisation;

1.2.2. support regional and local policies to strengthen public services in order to bring about a truly family-friendly society and to develop inter-generational relationships within families;

1.2.3. support the exchange and development of standards for and knowledge of pro-family policies, to allow a deeper understanding of such topics as gender, solidarity between generations, ageing, fertility, family models, the young generation, children, migration and health from a family perspective.

## C. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Luca Volontè, rapporteur[1]

### 1. Introduction

1. The revised European Social Charter stipulates that "the family as a fundamental unit of society has the right to appropriate social, legal and economic protection to ensure its full development" (Article 16). The rapporteur takes the view that the family is a powerful factor and driving force for social cohesion and development. The relationship between family and society is mutual, self-sustaining and empowering: a strong family is a fundamental asset for a good society and a cohesive and "family-friendly" society is necessary for the well-being of families.

2. The Council of Europe Revised Strategy for Social Cohesion stresses that the family is where social cohesion is first experienced and learnt and that any social cohesion strategy should seek to be supportive of families, while fully respecting the autonomy of the private sphere. The rapporteur therefore acknowledges that the bonds and relationships within the family should be designated as a domain of public policy and that the utmost should be done to create the requisite conditions for its well-being and development.

3. The family constitutes a primary, original and irreplaceable social relationship which represents a fundamental resource providing indispensable types of public and common assets. It develops innumerable social functions and, according to recent European surveys, it represents an important and stable value for European citizens.[2] The family provides multiple types of support for its members throughout its specific life cycle, particularly in times of social and economic crisis.

4. Owing to its properties (the structure and quality of its relationships) and capacities (of mediation between individuals and society), the family and its kinship network is the main social structure capable of alleviating much of the negative impact of the economic and social downturn and recession, especially in terms of increasing unemployment, job and financial insecurity, mortgage repayments, family indebtedness and poverty.

5. The rapporteur believes that in a complex and changing society, support and legal protection for families in fulfilling their functions are critical and should be at the top of the political agenda in all member states. Solidarity, mutual trust, the ability to give freely mutual responsibilities, the ability to care for others, that is, the family "social capital", are personal virtues that are initially generated within the family and then transmitted to society.

6. The Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Family Affairs on Public Policies Supporting the Wish to Have Children: Societal, Economic and Personal Factors, organised on 16 and 17 June 2009 in Vienna, offered an opportunity for the rapporteur to gain a better insight into the recent developments and the main challenges of family policies in the Council of Europe member states. The Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee also organised a hearing with Professor Linda Hantrais in London on 11 June 2009 to develop its reflections on this subject.

### 2. Family restructuring in Europe

7. The rapporteur identified a variety of relevant changes in the family life and structure In Europe. Actually, the family as a living system has always adapted to social change and new developments and new challenges for the family are emerging.

8. Trends such as population decline and ageing, increased diversity of family living arrangements, the impact of new gender roles on family life and higher female participation in the labour market exist in all European countries, albeit with variations within and between them.

9. The rapporteur notes that the rate and pace of these changes vary greatly between and within countries. The present-day structure of the family includes a variety of settings in which children are brought up and cared for (for example, single-parent families, reconstituted families, families of multi-ethnic origin, heterosexual and homosexual unions, civil unions).

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1. The rapporteur wishes to thank Professor Riccardo Prandini for his contribution in the preparation of this report.
2. Alber J., Fahey T. and Saraceno C. (eds), *Handbook of quality of life in the enlarged European Union*, Routledge, London and New York, 2008; Donati P. and Prandini R. (eds), *La cura della famiglia e il mondo del lavoro*, Franco Angeli, Milan, 2008.

10. Despite major differences between countries, the rapporteur believes that it is possible to forecast some general features of family structuring and restructuring in Europe, as follows:

10.1. the number of households will probably further rise, due to the increase in single-person households, falling birth rates and to processes of family disruption. At the same time, there will be a prospective increase in numbers of step-families, remarriages and new types of families;

10.2. nuclear and heterosexual families will likely remain the main forms of combining parenthood with conjugality and will reorganise themselves in new ways, but other forms of publicly recognised and socially accepted family life will also develop;

10.3. family relationships will become more fluid and family make-ups will probably change more frequently over individual lifetimes; all in all, the great majority of European people are likely to live their lives more or less in a "family context";

10.4. the culture of egalitarian family arrangements and fair division of labour will be further promoted, giving rise to new gender roles;

10.5. parent-child interactions and educational activities will be increasingly promoted and in younger families, parents will try to spend more time with their children;

10.6. the demographic profile of Europe will result in a growing proportion of elderly people. Intergenerational ties will remain important, with grandparents playing a key role in providing informal care and supporting dual-earner families;

10.7. a possible change in the balance between immigration and emigration will have a dramatic impact on family issues, with radical implications for public services and the role of the family in society;

10.8. broadly speaking, family wealth may increase, driven up by a rise in the number of dual-earner families. However, not all families will benefit equally from this growth, especially the more vulnerable families, namely unemployed households, lone-parent families, single-earner households and families with disabled or dependent members or with more than two children;

10.9. services, especially health and social services, will be increasingly important. This increasing demand can only be met by networking and ensuring the co-operation of public, private and civil organisations;

10.10. social services will move on from an assistance approach to a culture of subsidiarity and personal development; the treatment of social relations or of individuals in relation to others will be the new focus for social and health services, sustaining the "social bond" required for a cohesive society.

11. In the rapporteur's view the growing importance of the quality of family relationships, both conjugal and parental, is clearly emerging as a new issue for scientific and political debate; its internal "social capital" will have a greater effect on later events than the mere legal structure of the family.

12. This family "social capital" can be sustained and promoted by direct and indirect social policies run not only by the state but also by the private sector, voluntary and non-profit organisations and family associations.

### 3. Different national paths and the emergence of new family policy models

13. Many researchers have tried to model European "family policies". Today, consensus has been reached on the difficulty of securing a simple approach to this field of analysis. The rapporteur is of the opinion that there are two potentially conflicting and interconnected policy processes: a. the continuous differentiation of national policy paths; and b. the need for a new European political pattern, based on the idea of linking up personal and family responsibilities, individual and family rights, personal and family subjectivity. In this section the rapporteur shall be dealing with the former issue.

14. Each national structure and culture vis-à-vis family policies stresses a specific central issue, thus supporting a certain idea or vision of the family. Below are some well-known examples.[3]

14.1. In Sweden (and more generally in the Nordic countries), family policy was first framed in the early 20th century when social reforms were advocated to bring about a new society based on social solidarity and the vision of a "home for the people" (*folkhemmet*). In the early 1970s, Swedish family policy began strongly emphasising a dual-earner/dual-carer family model, which was also geared to strengthening gender equality. Various complementary social programmes coexist, such as widespread

availability of subsidised childcare, generous parental leave and equal employment legislation. Policy focuses on individual rights and gender equality. There are no specific, direct policies for the family per se.

14.2. Family policies in France target multiple goals such as encouraging parents (especially mothers) to become and remain involved in gainful employment, tackling social inequality, maintaining a high fertility rate and lowering levels of (child) poverty. Several policy measures continue to contribute to this, such as the long-standing and well-established preschool system (*école maternelle*). There seems to be widespread cultural support for public expenditure for children and large families. Policy orientation is towards *la famille*, conceived as a social good; however, the individualistic trend is also developing ever faster.

14.3. In early 2007, the Russian Government launched a new national reform to boost fertility rates and increase the well-being of families with children. The so-called "maternity capital" was designed to encourage multiple births. From 2010 onwards, mothers will have access to new opportunities, such as purchasing accommodation, covering educational costs and increasing pension savings. This family policy reform includes municipal vouchers for childcare and preschool facilities, equality bonuses to encourage fathers to take parental leave and childcare allowances.

14.4. From the late 1990s onwards, the discussions on the direction which German family policy could or should take were strongly dominated by the dilemma of encouraging young couples to have children, while reducing the costs of childbearing for mothers. The declining competitiveness of the German economy also triggered a discourse linking a new family policy with economic growth, a higher fertility rate and greater prosperity. Policies are basically centred on the family relationship, emphasising subsidiarity and the role of civil society organisations.

14.5. Tackling child poverty has been central to recent family policies in the United Kingdom. Getting more parents into work has been one of the government's main means of combating child poverty. Lone parents, who constitute the family type that most risks poverty, have been specifically targeted by these measures. The United Kingdom has also prioritised parenting in its social exclusion and criminal justice agendas and clearly considers the promotion of good parenting as a key tool in fostering social cohesion. In order to increase employment rates, various measures have been introduced to reconcile parenting and paid employment. All in all, rather than any specific family policy, a range of policies have been implemented to target significant strands of family and individual well-being, as well as social control.

14.6. In southern Europe, fertility and female workforce participation rates are generally lower and poverty rates are also higher. These countries are characterised by a "deficit" of family policies. The volume of cash benefits for families is very low. Parental leave may be relatively long but is poorly or not at all remunerated. Portugal is an exception, with slightly shorter periods of parental leave, cash benefits specifically targeting low-income families and much higher proportions of children under the age of three in formal childcare.

15. Many family policies reviews have found that no clear policy effects could be attributed either to the welfare regime or to specific family policy measures. The rapporteur takes the view that if policy is to effectively pursue social objectives, it must expand choice in terms of family life. This, in turn, is contingent upon a wide variety of factors such as: welfare state structures; the wider economic environment; access to labour markets, remuneration and opportunities and career development; social and personal time organisation, including flexibility of working arrangements; dominant societal and cultural norms regarding the employment of mothers with young children; family living arrangements, geographical proximity and availability of relatives; perceptions of the material, social and psychological benefits of employment; the direct economic, social and opportunity costs of parenting, especially for women; and individual lifestyle preferences, attitudes and value systems.

16. The difficulties of observing clear causal effects among policies and family life and formulating a single European family policy programme represent only the known side of the problem. The "dark side" is due to invisible or unclear effects of the current family policies on lifestyle and population.

3. Committee of Experts on Social Policy for Families and Children of the Council of Europe, "Antecedents and developments in the family policies of some Council of Europe member states", April 2009.

17. The rapporteur is aware that there are a number problems arising from mainstream family policies which latently deconstruct the family relationship and make it difficult to consider the family as a single focus for policies, namely:

17.1. growing discrepancies and contradictions between policy goals: governments are faced with policy dilemmas which fuel the debate on the legitimacy and effectiveness of state intervention in the private lives of families. For instance, incentives to encourage more women to participate in the labour force can compete with policy measures to curb falling birth-rates and encourage childbearing;

17.2. the risk that policies promoting flexible working time and leave arrangements perpetuate gender inequality and may be based on a simplistic view of "femininity" and "masculinity". For example, emphasis is often put on the desire to be employed full-time, if society provides widespread childcare services, despite evidence of the willingness to stay at home with the children, especially when they are very young. Parents usually combine several sources of formal and informal care, the more so when they have responsibility for both their children and their own parents;

17.3. the rise of a mother-friendly "workfare". Although it is described as "family-friendly", childcare policy (including services, parental leaves, etc.) could more aptly be described as "work-friendly", since the main objective is to make women available for work when they have children as a solution to welfare budget deficits and labour shortages. Another unintended consequence of those policies is to disregard the status of care work and the balance between formal and informal work;[4]

17.4. risks of individualism and "genderism": instead of considering the family as a social relationship and as the sole target of family policies, some policies target individuals outside of any relationship, unconnected, disembodied from their actual context. Individuals are considered as being within a frame of contemporary gender roles, rather than as being able to transcend them.[5]

18. Taking these risks into consideration, the rapporteur is also deeply concerned by the current economic crisis which has undoubtedly created a generally unfavourable social environment for most families all over Europe. He believes that it is worth recalling the ways in which policy makers have responded to a shortage of resources for financing family policy measures in the past.

**4. The impact of the crisis on families: policy reactions and lessons from the past**

19. Global economic crises hit the budgets of many governments. No research results or analyses of the actual impact of the current crisis on families in Europe are available so far but the rapporteur takes the view that it is not difficult to predict some of the consequences.

20. In times of crisis, most governments cut social expenditure in order to counter severe budgetary deficits. Among the strategies that many of them have applied in the past are the introduction of benefit targeting in place of universal family benefit and the subtler strategy of reducing benefits by omitting to index cash benefits. High levels of inflation therefore generally led to the gradual erosion of purchasing power and of the real value of child benefits.

21. Among other measures implemented have been: entitlement reduction or possible extension of the duration of entitlement (for example, parental leave), although not paid and/or not guaranteeing a return to one's former job; a decrease in wage compensation; and abolishing certain benefits or former price subsidies for goods consumed particularly by children and families.

22. Some governments have introduced a compensation benefit or an income threshold for entitlement. A move from universal child benefits (horizontal redistribution) towards more targeted benefit allocation, or means-tested benefits (stressing vertical redistribution) reflected the pressure on government budgets and the need to reform their social protection systems, as well as the growing concern to tackle increased poverty levels.[6]

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4. OECD, "Babies and bosses. Reconciling work and family life. A synthesis of findings for OECD countries", Paris, 2007; Bould S., "The need for international family policy: mothers as workers and as carers", *Marriage and Family Review*, Vol. 39, No. 3/4, 2006.

5. European Commission, "Family life and the needs for an ageing population", Flash Eurobarometer 247, 2008.

6. Letablier M.-T. et al., "The costs of raising children and the effectiveness of policies to support parenthood in European countries: a literature review", European Commission, 2008.

23. At the same time, other measures or benefits have also been introduced: provisions for large families are one example, or extending coverage to additional categories of citizens/residents, such as entitlement to insurance-based maternity benefit for uninsured mothers, pregnancy benefits for uninsured student mothers, the right to parental leave for full-time students, parental benefit for all uninsured mothers, coverage of child benefits, which long came under social insurance, being gradually extended to families outside formal employment as increasing levels of unemployment have eroded the coverage, more flexible types of leave arrangements or the introduction of additional types.

24. The rapporteur observes that even in times of socio-economic hardship, governments not only remove or reduce certain benefits but may also introduce or increase other types. They may also reorganise the systems governing such services between the state and private and social providers. This clearly expresses the different kinds of objectives that policy makers are pursuing by means of their family policy measures.

## 5. The family as a social and cohesive capital: the relevance of relationship quality for its members and for society

25. Given the new economic situation and the paradoxical effects that mainstream family policies have on the population, the rapporteur calls for a different vision of the family and of the social policies needed in times of crisis. In this regard he wishes to draw attention to the added value of the family relationships.

26. The family is a social institution which is important not only for the well-being of its members but also for societal, economic, political, civic, cultural and other public reasons.

27. In the rapporteur's view, what really counts in a family is the quality of relations among its members and between them and society. The way in which members of the family behave towards one another, namely generously, confidently, reciprocally, supportively, altruistically, fairly, or not as the case may be, generates what we can call "family subjectivity" and strongly influences the way in which the family performs its social functions.

28. One can distinguish four different functions of the family which are relevant both to its member and to society:

28.1. economic and instrumental functions: creating labour force, employment, entrepreneurship and therefore economic growth and development, that is, creating economic capital;

28.2. educational and enabling functions: caring for children and the elderly, nurturing newborn babies, supervising and educating children, supporting and helping elderly people, helping family members to fulfil their potential in life, preparing young people for positive entry into society, that is, generating and regenerating human capital;

28.3. cohesive and integrative function: working on community development, creating strong social ties and bonds, bridging and bonding between different communities, providing inter-generational and informal support between the family and other relations, creating and transmitting social capital and generating social inclusion. This social capital is connected with the production of such social assets as academic achievement for children, reduction of crime rates, reduction of neighbourhood problems, internalisation of civic virtues, participation in public life, promotion of trust, etc.;

28.4. cultural and expressive functions: generation and regeneration of cultural capital and identity assets, such as risk-sharing between partners and children, personality formation, caring relationships, a sense of belonging, stress management, healthy living, ensuring emotional fulfilment, etc.

29. An endless list of research projects, focusing in particular on legally recognised relationships, has shown the importance of family ties. Below are some recent findings:[7]

29.1. stable couples tend to have higher incomes and a lower risk of poverty and to accumulate more wealth; they are happier, less prone to depression and suicide and live longer;

29.2. the male partner's earnings, occupation or education are positively associated with the transition to marriage; low income seems to be a major reason for long-term cohabitation rather than marriage;

29.3. divorced individuals have lower physical and emotional well-being than married individuals; parental separation is associated with a range of childhood, adolescent and adult problems for children;

7. Amato P. R. et al., *Alone together*, Harvard University Press, 2008; United Kingdom Department for Children, Schools and Families, "Families in Britain: an evidence paper", 2008.

29.4. the decrease in income after a relationship breakdown is usually greater for women than for men; however, men, too, experience negative effects in terms of employment; stable economic, emotional and physical circumstances also promote relationship quality before and after separation;

29.5. the positive effect of women's employment and the resulting financial independence in terms of the divorce risk is not significant for women who hold egalitarian gender role attitudes, suggesting that for these women, employment may at the same time have a positive effect on relationship quality. Most studies find little or no negative effect of a mother's employment on her child's development, which is more than offset by the positive effects on family wealth;

29.6. perceptions of unfairness in the division of domestic work lower women's relationship satisfaction and well-being;

29.7. long working hours and work overload can reduce relationship and parenting quality for men and women;

29.8. children whose parents are predictably responsive to their needs form more secure attachments; secure attachment increases the likelihood of positive peer interaction and behavioural advantages in preschool and early school years;

29.9. more parental time spent on stimulating child-centred activities is associated with better behavioural and cognitive results for children. Good relationship quality between mother and father are positively associated with the warmth of the parent-child relationship;

29.10. how parents interact with their children (parenting style) and the quality of parental time seem more important for a child's development than the fact that time is reduced by the mother's employment;

29.11. while there are exceptions, generally early childhood attachment is a strong predictor of adolescent behaviours and later educational and employment situations.

30. In short, the rapporteur is of the opinion that good internal quality of family relations reduces the need for public services and welfare intervention. In this sense, primary relationships (internal to the family) are strongly linked to later public or common relationships. A recent study by the American sociologist Paul R. Amato stresses that changes in family structure have had substantial costs for the American society. For example, the decline in married households during the second half of the 20th century was an important contributing factor to the growth in child poverty in the United States during the 1970s and 1980s. Teenage childbearing, in particular, cost taxpayers US$7.3 billion in 2004.

31. These costs are due to increase taxpayer expenditure to combat poverty, criminal justice and school nutrition programmes, and to the lower levels of taxes paid by individuals whose adult productivity has been undermined by growing up in poverty caused by family break-ups. Clearly, non-marital births, divorce and marital dysfunction are extremely costly for American society. In summary, changes in American marriage and family structure since the 1960s have decreased the average level of child well-being in the population, lowered the well-being of many adults, increased child poverty and placed a large financial burden on society.[8]

32. These consequences are now being perpetuated by economic shocks, as unemployment increases the probability of couples splitting and crisis. For these reasons, attempts to strengthen families and increase the percentage of children raised in healthy two-parent families has recently emerged as an important public policy objective also in Europe.

## 6. Conclusions

33. The rapporteur very much agrees with the analyses of the Council of Europe High-level Task Force on Social Cohesion in the 21st Century, namely that policy can no longer take the existence of families for granted. A comprehensive family policy should be a core priority for each European country, linking income, childcare facilities, gender equality, education, social and cultural services, inter-generational solidarity, employment and infrastructural provision and planning.

8. United States Census Bureau, *Statistical abstract of the United States*, Washington DC, 2006.

34. Like other forms of intervention, government support and action are subsidiary to those of families. Government and other policy actors are responsible for helping families constantly to build strong and healthy relationships and achieve their full potential, creating equal opportunities and ensuring that families flourish by supporting and enhancing their special status and encouraging family social capital. Family intervention programmes must be proportionate to the families' capacities for shouldering their responsibilities.

35. There is evidence that when family-friendly policies are pursued consistently over a long period, they do have a positive effect on individual decisions to have children and tackle the demographic problems of Europe. Policy makers should recognise and promote family rights in all the areas covered by the policy, recognise the fundamental rights of parents to educate their children and promote the active participation of parents and family associations in the formulation, organisation, implementation and evaluation of the family policies.

36. The rapporteur considers that governments work more effectively when in partnership with the other actors in the policy system of the welfare society: corporations, civil society organisations and families. Family policy is a multi-actor field of action in which local authorities, non-governmental organisations, civil society and the families themselves all have an essential role to play.

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*Reporting committee*: Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee

*Reference to committee:* Doc. 11782, Reference 3521 of 26 January 2009

*Draft resolution and recommendation* adopted unanimously by the committee on 11 December 2009

Members of the committee: Mrs Christine **McCafferty** (Chairperson), Mr Denis **Jacquat** (1st Vice-Chairperson), Ms Liliane Maury Pasquier (2nd Vice-Chairperson), Ms Fátima **Aburto Baselga**, Mr Francis Agius, Mr Farkhad Akhmedov, Mr Milos Aligrudić, Ms Karin Andersen, Ms Magdalina Anikashvili, Mr Konstantinos **Aivaliotis,** Ms Sirpa Asko-Seljavaara, Mr Lokman **Ayva**, Mr Mario Barbi, Mr Andris Berzinš, Mr Roland Blum, Ms Olena Bondarenko, Ms Monika Brüning, Ms Bożenna Bukiewicz, Ms Karmela Caparin, Mr Igor Chernyshenko (alternate: Mr **Parfenov**), Mr Desislav **Chukolov**, Mr Agustín **Conde Bajén,** Mr Imre **Czinege,** Mr Karl Donabauer, Ms Emilia Fernández Soriano (alternate:Mrs Blanca **Fernández-Capel Baños**), Ms Daniela Filipiová, Ms Ilija Filipović, Mr Paul Flynn, Ms Pernille Frahm, Ms Doris Frommelt, Mr Marco Gatti, Mr Ljubo Germič, Mr Luc Goutry, Mr Neven Gosović, Ms Claude Greff, Ms Dzhema **Grozdanova**, Mr Michael **Hancock**, Ms Olha Herasym'yuk, Mr Ali Huseynov, Mr Fazail İbrahimli, Mr Birkir Jón Jónsson, Ms Marietta **Karamanli**, Mr Włodzimierz Karpiński, Mr Michail **Katrinis,** Mr András Kelemen, Mr Peter Kelly, Baroness Knight of Collingtree, Mr Haluk **Koç**, Mr Oleg Lebedev, Mr Paul Lempens, Mr Bernard **Marquet**, Mr Patrick Moriau, Mr Felix Müri, Ms Christine Muttonen, Ms Carina **Ohlsson,** Mr Peter **Omtzigt**, Ms Lajla Pernaska, Mr Zoran Petreski, Ms Marietta de Pourbaix-Lundin, Mr Cezar **Florin Preda**, Mr Vjerica Radeta, Mr Maria Pilar Riba Font, Mr Walter Riester, Mr Nicolae Robu, Mr Ricardo Rodrigues, Ms Maria de Belém Roseira, Ms Marlene Rupprecht (alternate: Mr Wolfgang **Wodarg**), Mr Indrek Saar, Mr Maurizio Saia, Mr Fidias **Sarikas**, Mr Ellert Schram, Ms Anna Sobecka, Ms Michaela **Šojdrová**, Mr Marc Spautz, Mrs Arūnė Stirblytė, Mr Oreste Tofani, Mr Mihai Tudose, Mr Alexander Ulrich, Mr Mustafa **Ünal**, Mr Milan Urbáni, Mr Luca **Volontè**, Mr Victor Yanukovych, Mr Vladimir Zhidkikh

NB: The names of the members who took part in the meeting are printed in **bold**

Secretariat of the committee: Mr Mezei, Ms Lambrecht, Ms Arzilli