



Resolution 1720 (2010)¹

Final version

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

Parliamentary Assembly

1. There are wide-ranging discussions and predictions about the implications of the global economic downturn for social policies and relations. Significant amongst the concerns raised is the potential negative impact of the current economic crisis on families and family relationships and the 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 the family unit is a fundamental element to aid in the economic recovery, especially during times of adversity and change. The family produces assets and is a factor for development. Peace, stability, cohesion and solidarity, child rearing, informal services and assistance, care, freedom and responsibility, well-being, savings, economic stability and intergenerational solidarity are some of the countless and often taken-for-granted 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 to 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 they do not 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 how families form and dissolve, 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 trusting 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 solidarity between their members.
5. The Assembly takes the view that demographic changes, low birth rates, population ageing and women's increasing participation in the workforce are some of the factors which are driving societies to invest in human capital by adopting dynamic family policies. A growing consciousness of the lifelong impact of inadequate or unstable care on a child should also remain a key concern for policy makers. They also have to consider how they can improve social and economic policy arrangements for the family and prepare the ground for the fulfilment of the desire to have children.

1. *Assembly debate* on 27 April 2010 (13th Sitting) (see [Doc. 12103](#), report of the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee, rapporteur: Mr Volonté). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 27 April 2010 (13th Sitting). See also [Recommendation 1912 \(2010\)](#).



6. The Assembly believes that family policies are not limited to financial benefits alone. Governments must remain conscious of the impact of social policies on families and work towards phased co-ordination of their policies to make them more “family-friendly”. To this end, the Assembly encourages the member states of the Council of Europe to give consideration 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 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 assume their responsibilities to their children;
- 6.2. encouraging stable relationships, according to Article 12 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5) and to other social arrangements based on reciprocity, equality and freedom;
- 6.3. providing families with adequate support, when necessary, on the ground that the family is 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 a family and raise children in a safe and caring environment; developing social housing programmes especially targeted at young couples and large families;
- 6.5. supporting intergenerational 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 the 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 responsibilities and family life;
- 6.6. tackling social exclusion, disruptions and poverty, particularly of single-parent families, families at risk, large families and migrant families. Discussions on different family models should focus on the consequences divorce has 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 families which are disadvantaged or dysfunctional as a consequence of family breakdown: the increased risk of poverty among children in single-parent families is found to be reinforced by disadvantages at school, as well as poorer health and housing problems. 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 childcare, flexible work 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 both women and men, as current flexible employment schemes have a higher take-up rate among women, which in reality perpetuates the gender divide with regard to paid and unpaid work and impacts on women's decisions to have children or not;
- 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 preschool, after-school care for children of school age and for children with special needs, in particular sick and disabled children. Integrated childcare services, such as childcare at home 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 so as to relieve women of the double burden of employment and domestic duties, while encouraging men to take an active part in family life.