

IFHE is an International Non Governmental Organisation (INGO) in consultative status with the United Nations (ECOSOC, FAO, UNESCO, UNICEF) and with the Council of Europe

INTERNATIONALER VERBAND
FÜR HAUSWIRTSCHAFT
IVHW

Kaiser-Friedrich-Straße 13
53113 Bonn · Germany
Fon + 49 (0) 228 - 9212590
Fax + 49 (0) 228 - 9212591
E-Mail office.ifhe@t-online.de

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INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION
FOR HOME ECONOMICS

"Changing Families: Challenges and Opportunities"

The United Nations General Assembly, in its resolution 47/237 of 20 September 1993, proclaimed that 15 May of every year shall be observed as the International Day of Families.

The international theme for 2006 is **"Changing Families: Challenges and Opportunities"**. This theme provides an opportunity to raise public awareness about crucial issues concerning families.

The International Federation for Home Economics (IFHE) is an International Non-Governmental Organisation (INGO) having consultative relationship with ECOSOC of the United Nations which works in close co-operation with the UN Specialized Agencies. The ultimate goal of the Federation is the improvement of the quality of everyday life for individuals, families and households through the management of their resources. Its aims are to promote awareness that families and households are the prime nurturing environment for every human being and to promote the concept of families and households as operating unit within a larger social, economic and physical environment, and also to press for the recognition of the need for education for home and family life in all areas, for both genders, for all age levels and in all societies.

Families – most valuable sources of societies

The Family -as the basic unit of society- plays a key role in social development. It is a force of social cohesion and integration. In different cultural, political and social systems, various forms of families exist. Equality and equity between women and men and respect for the rights of all family members are essential for family well-being and for society at large.

Challenges for Family Policies

Greater attention should be paid

- to help the family in its supporting, educating and nurturing roles, to the causes and consequences of family disintegration, and to the adoption of measures to reconcile work and family life for women and men."
- to meet the needs of families and their individual members, particularly in the areas of economic support and provision of social services.

Social and economic policies must be designed

- to meet the needs of families and their individual members, especially the most disadvantaged members, with particular attention to the care of children;
- to insure opportunities for family members to understand and meet their social responsibilities;
- to promote mutual respect, tolerance and co-operation within the family and within society;
- to promote equal partnership between women and men in the family.

IFHE emphasizes that in the world of today, society is a complex set of relationships that appears in many forms. There is change over a life cycle of individual families. A family friendly society recognises benefits and problems that the families encounter while fulfilling their function.

The ECOSOC (General Assembly Resolution 57/165, 18. Dec. 2002) indicates 5 major trends affecting families world wide which IFHE will consider and recognises in its works.

1. Changes in family structure

- shift from extended to nuclear families, as well as a rise of one-person household and of cohabitation, which became evident during the last 50 years,
- declining fertility rates, increasing divorce rates and an increase in the number of older persons, all of which result in smaller size households, rising age at first marriage (mid- to late twenties in all regions of the world), and
- declining numbers of children per family

2. Demographic ageing

Lower fertility rates and a higher life expectancy result in larger numbers of older persons within the overall population, with strong implications for families

3. Rise of migration

Seasonal and internal migration of men contributes to higher numbers of female-headed households around the world. Migration can also cause major stress when families are confronted with cultural, racial and religious differences, and with integration issues.

4. The HIV/AIDS pandemic

It affects the most productive members of society, often as they start their own families. This leads to changed family structures, such as adolescent- or grand parent-headed households are increasingly encountered in some regions of Africa. These families must cope with the trauma of losing family members, and still care for infected family members and the increasing number of orphans, all of which causes stress on families and societies.

5. The impact of globalisation

This often means a reduction of services for families due to spending cuts in the area of education and health, in unemployment benefits as well as in general welfare provisions. All of these outlined trends put greater strain on families regarding their societal function. Families and their members are experts in their own affairs and should be enabled to fulfil these important roles and tasks, to carry out their functions.