

Social Protection for Children and their Families:

A Global Review of Trends and Outcomes

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Given global demographic and social trends, the need for new policy and program responses is essential. This paper will identify and describe the trends in social protection policies and programs affecting children and their families around the world, and the most significant outcomes. The focus will be on cash benefits (income transfers and tax benefits), non-cash family benefits and services, employment-related policies, and the extent to which all of these are rights or entitlements, on the one hand, or discretionary on the other.

The first section of the paper will provide an overview of the traditional child-conditioned social protection policies in high-income OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) and EU (European Union) countries as well as the initiatives addressing more recent risks such as lone parenthood, and the major policy outcomes. This section will draw primarily from previous research on the OECD countries (Kamerman et al 2003), from the Columbia University Clearinghouse on Child, Youth, and Family Policies, and from a trend analysis of data on social protection expenditures for children and their families (Gatenio Gabel & Kamerman, 2006).

The second section will provide an overview of the trends and outcomes in social protection child and family policies in a parallel sample of less developed and developing countries in Latin America, the CEE/CIS region, Asia, and Africa. The strategy of cash benefits and conditionality will be discussed as well as the role of social services. The policies described would include some of those addressing traditional risks as well as those targeted on vulnerable and disadvantaged children and families with special needs, such as: street children, child and women trafficking, child labor, HIV/AIDS, early care and education, and child-headed households. This section will draw largely on research carried out for UNICEF and UNESCO.

The third and concluding section will address some cross-cutting trends and issues such as the qualifying conditions for receipt of benefits, the balance between cash and in-kind benefits, the issues of targeting and selectivity, and, if data are available, the extent of coverage.

The authors conclude that the instruments and goals of the family benefit and service package - of child and family policies - have changed over time with services linked to reconciling work and family becoming more important in the industrialized countries while confronting severe poverty has remained a priority in the developing countries, with growing interest in increasing children's human capital.