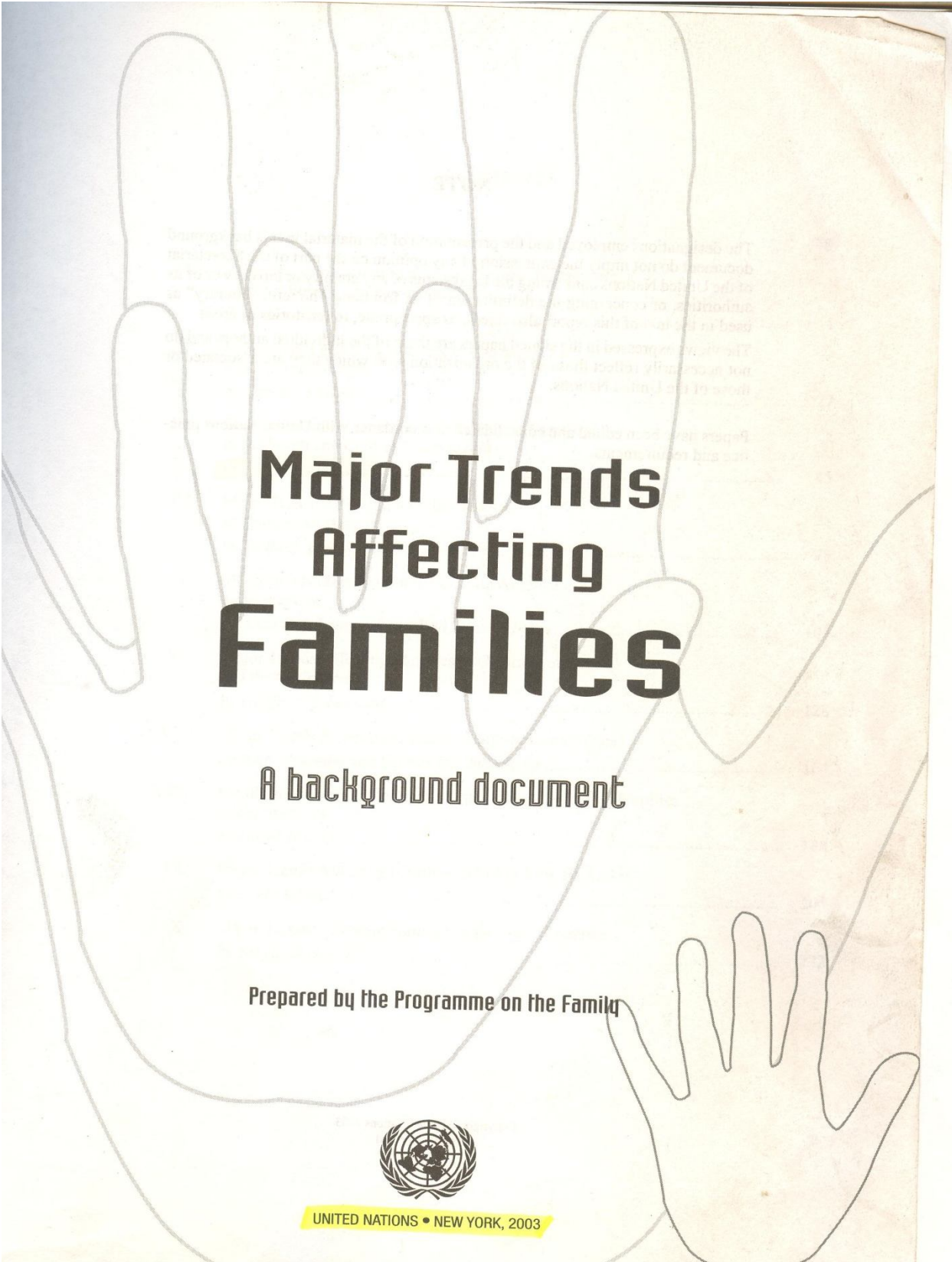


Economic & Social Affairs

Major Trends Affecting Families



UNITED NATIONS



**Major Trends
Affecting
Families**

A background document

Prepared by the Programme on the Family



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NOTE

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Papers have been edited and consolidated in accordance with United Nations practice and requirements.

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PREFACE

The observance of the International Year of the Family (IYF) in 1994, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 44/82, highlighted the role of families as basic social units in human-centred sustainable development and raised awareness of the need to pay attention to the family dimension in development efforts.

The objectives of IYF are to stimulate local, national and international actions as part of a sustained long-term effort to:

- increase awareness of family issue among Governments as well as in the private sector. IYF would serve to highlight the importance of families; increase a better understanding of their functions and problems; promote knowledge of the economic, social and demographic processes affecting families and their members; and focus attention upon the rights and responsibilities of all family members;
- strengthen national institutions to formulate, implement and monitor policies in respect of families;
- stimulate efforts to respond to problems affecting, and affected by, the situation of families;
- enhance the effectiveness of local, regional and national efforts to carry out specific programmes concerning families by generating new activities and strengthening existing ones;
- improve the collaboration among national and international non-governmental organizations in support of multi-sectoral activities; and
- build upon the results of international activities concerning women, children, youth, the aged and the disabled, as well as other major events of concern to the family or its individual members.

A decade later, the General Assembly, in its resolution 54/124 of 17 December 1999, proclaimed 2004 as the Tenth Anniversary of the IYF. It also reaffirmed the importance of long-term action that would translate the increased awareness of families and family issues into concrete measures to support them in their social and developmental functions and to promote changes in families, where appropriate, and build on their strengths. A major thrust of the IYF is the need to ascertain sound knowledge, data and research on the situation and needs of families worldwide. Setting priorities, identifying needs and bottlenecks and encouraging innovative approaches to emerging and vital concerns is imperative. The study entitled "Major Trends Affecting Families" reflects this imperative.

The genesis of this study began during a meeting between representatives of Regional Commissions and the Family Programme in early October 2001, wherein an analytical study on major regional trends affecting families was conceived. This study is a contribution to the Tenth Anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2004. The Regional Commissions suggested candidates from each of their regions. The Secretariat, in cooperation with the Regional Commissions, identified the trends. These trends are: changes in family structure (smaller size households, delayed marriage and childbearing, increases in divorce rates and single-parenthood), the rise of migration, the issue of demographic ageing, the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the impact of globalization on families. These salient issues require perspective, analysis and understanding for purposes of policy development planning. Therein lies their significance.

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