

ELFAC PAPERS

European Large Families Confederation

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Numbers Matter: Living in a Crowd

Testimonial for the side event organized by ELFAC on 10 February 2022 for the 60th. Session of the Commission for Social Development, United Nations—([Watch it here](#))



We are the Aponte Pardo Family (Bogotá, Colombia), we have 9 kids from 6 to 21 years old, there are 6 girls and 3 boys. We have 2 miscarriages, three babies – two of them were twins. We've been married for 22 years and 5 more years since we knew each other and started dating.

Carlos Aponte



The first thing that we want to share with you, is what most people ask when they realize that we have 9 kids. First, they ask: **What was in your mind when we took this path?** The second question usually is: **How do we cope with that responsibility specifically during this pandemic time?** And the third question is always about the future and **where the**

money will come from, the perspective of the professional education of our kids or our elderly age.

I think that It was the desire of a dream. Coming from a dysfunctional family, in my case, then encountering the values of faith and hope, in the power of the greatest Love, and falling in love with Carolina at a young age, started the dream for the family we always wished for.

Carolina Pardo



When people asked us about How we cope with our family? Different ideas came to our minds.

As a woman I must stand by myself because nowadays people don't think someone in their sound judgment can think of having by their own will a large family. With the support of statistics and demography studies people relate large

families with lower income families who don't have access to education and in Latin America to a macho model. **Even though, clearly large families are a minority, we as citizens in a democratic state, do have freedom on deciding how many kids we want to have, and in a responsible way, how we are going to raise them.** Carlos and I always dreamed as he just said of having a large family.

We consider we are not perfect; the perfect family does not exist. But I do consider Carlos, the kids and I worked every day together to live our lives in the way we can solve the problems, construct nice memories together, deal with our resources which are limited, and with the love and effort we all put in our home, the good things happened not because there is not suffering in them, or they came by spontaneous generation, but because together we can keep going.

In our country Colombia, public education and public health are given to all citizens, the thing is the quality is not competitive. In Latin America there are social differences that make families choose private schools and health care insurance, on top of the public services. In that sense **for us as a large family the monthly expense in education and in health insurance is a big portion of our budget.** And our kids know that and appreciate the effort we do as parents so they can have better education.

At the same time our oldest kids have jobs that can fit their university study schedules and help themselves with their daily expenses. Also, they have good marks that make them eligible to have scholarships. In this sense we have seen that they started to participate in a responsible way in committing to the construction of their own lives, which is the goal that all parents want for their kids, to raise them autonomous and independent so they can achieve their life's project and purpose.

With the little ones **we have organize the household chores, so as a team, we all can participate**, cleaning, cooking, doing laundry and grocery shopping. Before they are teens they do their chores as a game, they like to feel they are giving with their small task when it is done. When you keep on repeating a good action it becomes a habit. So, we can say that habits, where discipline, order, constancy, and hard work are shown, help us cope with our daily lives.

One of the struggles young families have is to find baby care facilities where they can leave their kids with confidence and without expending a lot. For 17 years Carlos and I decided that I was going to put my profession

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as an engineer aside, to raise our kids. Carlos at that point was the only household income, it was good enough to sustain us. And on the other hand, as a stay-at-home mom, I could take care of my kids until they started preschool when they turned 4 years old.

During those years Carlos was transferred to Canada with the company where he worked. **For 7 years we could experience life in the first world**, where the Commonwealth assures the health care and education for all the citizens in equal conditions. For us as a large family knowing that our kids could attend a good school and have healthcare coverage was a relief. Also, to have tax benefits in terms of the children you have, and monthly benefits makes us have a good quality of life.

On our way back home, 5 years ago, when our youngest, Ana Maria turned 1 year old, I was hired to start a pre-school close in the town where we live. Since then, I've been working with families and kids accompanying them in the amazing adventure of education where you can see kids develop and grow.

Since the pandemic started, we had to cope with unemployment, the economic sector where my husband worked failed in their income and many were laid off. He started his own consulting business as an Engineer but for the last 2 years my job gave the family income.

During the lockdowns, we also could see the benefits of having siblings with whom our children could play, talk, and even fight, they didn't feel lonely or bored. **The mental health and affectivity which turned unstable for many families during the school's closures**, for us had been a moment in our lives to know each other better and to share more deeply. The first social skills are given in the family as the cell of society, and **having a large family really construct social values as compassion, generosity, understanding and tolerance**.

Supporting the large families should be on every government agenda, giving the opportunity to have good education, health care and job opportunities, because what large families give back to society is citizens that have the fortitude to keep on going, because within their families they lived all the values I've just referred to.

Finally, as a large family we had learned to have priorities and acknowledge the difference between what we want or what we really need in terms of buying tech gadgets, clothes, entertainment and even kitchen stuff. Because most of the thing's publicity tells you can't live with, are not necessary. **Living in a country where you can see poverty and hunger in almost every street, makes you have a social conscience and rely on gratitude and ask yourself; How with your daily work and within your family you can make a better world?**



At last, but not least, that leaves us with the questions about the future: How are you going to pay for higher education for our kids to be skilled professionals? What about a pension plan? Are you going to be a load to their future? The simple answer to these questions and more that could pop up is that I don't know the answer.

And it is healthy to keep it that way.

What we have and what we know is we have today, the past has gone, and in the third world where we live, **poverty can be addressed to with health care and quality education accessible to all, an investment in human capital even for the poorest country, to give more equal opportunities to all to have healthy and stronger (large) families.**

International Workshop: Bringing Large Families Back on the Policy Agenda

Date: 2-day workshop, in early-June 2022 (dates to be announced). **Location:** UCD Geary Institute for Public Policy, Dublin, Ireland



UCD Geary Institute for Public Policy
Research, Analysis, Evidence

Recent studies show that large families are much more common than assumed in wealthy nations (Curran 2021, Fahey 2017, Bujard et al. 2019), but receive very little research and policy attention. While recent decades have seen a poverty research and policy focus on lone parent families, children in large families face a similar risk of poverty today. In some countries (e.g. Ireland), children in large families experience a higher risk of poverty than those in lone parent households. This international workshop aims to mainstream a renewed research and policy focus on large families, learn from international data and experiences, and bring together an interdisciplinary field of researchers. The goal is to refocus inequality and poverty studies on an important, but often overlooked, aspect of contemporary children's circumstances: children's family size. Policymakers, advocates, and practitioners are also invited to highlight policy problems and discuss solutions.

This workshop aims to revive this under-recognised perspective on inequality and poverty risk for children. We welcome papers that address large families from diverse disciplinary backgrounds, methodological perspective and across the globe. In particular, we are interested in papers that contribute to our empirical understanding of:

- What constitutes a large family today? Some studies draw the line at 3 children (Bujard et al. 2019), while other

estimates consider only four and more children (Curran 2019).

- What is the socio-demographic profile of large families? In popular –and potentially harmful– discourses, two competing extremes often dominate the debate and media portrayals that the modern large family is either a rich one (purposefully large to show they can afford to be) or a poor one (purposefully to claim child-related benefits). We are seeking papers that detail the profile of contemporary large families as well as contributions that scrutinise these discourses and public perceptions through empirical analysis.

- How are social policy interventions target large families? Single-country or comparative policy papers are sought that analyse social policy interventions addressing large families, including changes over time. This includes policy simulations on the distributive effects of how number of siblings are treated in benefit and tax systems.

This conference aims to build a new network of researchers interested in large families, alongside a special issue.

Organisers:

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