Family Emoji Redesign: Gender Inclusive Variants

Author: Sean Stewart on behalf of the Emoji Subcommittee (ESC)
Date: 19 December 2022

Introduction

Document [L2/22-276](#) proposes a deprecation strategy for the 26 standardized family emoji by recommending that vendors adopt a silhouette-based design, which is intended to communicate to users that the family emoji characters do not support skintone presentation. Vendors are encouraged to adopt the deprecation strategy but, of course, are free to continue to support the 26 family emoji in part, in whole, or are otherwise free to remove them from their keyboards.

A selection challenge becomes apparent for vendors who both desire to continue supporting the family emoji on their keyboard palettes and also desire to adopt the design change recommendations proposed by [L2/22-276](#). Since the design of the family emojis will be collapsed into 4 discrete, silhouette-based representations (i.e. *1 adult, 1 child* 👤 ; *1 adult, 2 children* 👥 ; *2 adults, 1 child* 👪 ; *2 adults; 2 children* 👨‍👩‍👧‍👦), should vendors continue to keep all outgoing family sequences on their keyboards once the design change be adopted? If so, which of the outgoing family sequences remain?

The decision to keep or remove any or all of the family emojis from a keyboard, once again, remains at the discretion of the vendor. For those vendors wishing to both adopt the design change *and* to keep family emoji on their keyboard, this document provides a reasonable means to do so.

Challenge of Removing Family Emoji

No precedent yet has been established for the removal of an RGI emoji from a vendor's keyboard. Instead, design changes have occurred throughout the past (and may continue as well) to address various challenges with emoji characters whose removal from keyboards may have been a valid option. Although no rule prevents a vendor from removing RGI emoji characters from their keyboard, some vendors may choose to wholly avoid pursuing such options unless absolutely necessary.

The ESC continues to signal that individual emoji characters can be used as building blocks, chained together in sequences that communicate more complex semantics by means of the sum of the parts of the sequence. For example, a more potent representation of a family can be achieved by chaining together sequences of people emoji as follows: 👵👨👩🧓👧👨👶, 👩🧔👶🧑🧔, 🧑‍🦱👱🧒, etc. That being said, some vendors do find value in keeping family emoji on their keyboards in tandem with adopting the design change recommendation.

Selection Challenge of Keeping Family Emoji

However, keeping **all** outgoing family combinations on the keyboard will result in up to 9 identical emoji glyphs on the keyboard (although underlying encoding of these glyphs will be different), which may very likely confuse end users. For example, the design of all of the existing 9 family emoji glyphs that represent two adults with genders and two children with genders will be collapsed into a common design:

For vendors wishing to keep all the existing family emojis on their keyboard palettes, a user experience challenge may arise. Keeping with the example of a family consisting of 4 gendered individuals above, if a user selects one of these new silhouettes, they will emit any one of the following existing RGI sequences:

```
1F468 200D 1F469 200D 1F467 200D 1F466     ; RGI_Emoji_ZWJ_Sequence  ; family: man, woman, girl, boy

1F468 200D 1F469 200D 1F466 200D 1F466     ; RGI_Emoji_ZWJ_Sequence  ; family: man, woman, boy, boy

1F468 200D 1F469 200D 1F467 200D 1F467     ; RGI_Emoji_ZWJ_Sequence  ; family: man, woman, girl, girl

1F468 200D 1F468 200D 1F466 200D 1F466     ; RGI_Emoji_ZWJ_Sequence  ; family: man, man, boy, boy

1F468 200D 1F468 200D 1F467 200D 1F467     ; RGI_Emoji_ZWJ_Sequence  ; family: man, man, girl, girl

1F469 200D 1F469 200D 1F466 200D 1F466     ; RGI_Emoji_ZWJ_Sequence  ; family: woman, woman, boy, boy

1F469 200D 1F469 200D 1F467 200D 1F467     ; RGI_Emoji_ZWJ_Sequence  ; family: woman, woman, girl, girl

1F468 200D 1F468 200D 1F467 200D 1F466     ; RGI_Emoji_ZWJ_Sequence  ; family: man, man, girl, boy

1F469 200D 1F469 200D 1F467 200D 1F466     ; RGI_Emoji_ZWJ_Sequence  ; family: woman, woman, girl, boy
```

Although the glyphs will look identical, the underlying encoding differs. While this challenge of identical glyphs is not new to the Unicode encoding and font technologies (e.g. é vs é: `U+00E9 é LATIN SMALL LETTER E WITH ACUTE` versus a sequence consisting of `U+0065 e LATIN SMALL LETTER E` followed by `U+0301 ´ COMBINING ACUTE ACCENT`), the principle issue here regarding the family emojis is one of gender identity.

Vendor Hesitation

Since the underlying encoding of the existing RGI family sequences will remain unchanged and since those underlying encodings express male and female gender identities via the `U+1F468` 👨 `MAN`, `U+1F469` 👩 `WOMAN`, `U+1F466` 👦 `BOY`, and `U+1F467` 👧 `GIRL` codepoints, some vendors remain hesitant to adopt the new designs without ***both*** having a solution to remove the duplicate glyphs as a means to reduce user confusion ***and also*** to prevent the unintentional communication/misrepresentation of gender identity.

Therefore, any vendor wishing to reduce the number of family emojis on their keyboard palette from 26 (i.e. the existing gendered combinations plus the inclusive variant) to 4 (the discrete, gender-inclusive silhouettes), must decide which of the existing emojis remain. Since all of the existing RGI sequences in one way or another express or otherwise communicate gender identity, 4 new, genderless RGI sequences should be added to the RGI in order to avoid this challenge.

These new emoji characters should be categorized as "symbols" on keyboards as opposed to their current category of "people".

Proposed New RGI Sequences

Sample Image	Sequence	Fallback	RGI Data File Addition
🧑‍🧒	1F9D1 200D 1F9D2	👦👦	`1F9D1 200D 1F9D2 ; family: adult, child`
🧑‍🧒‍🧒	1F9D1 200D 1F9D2 200D 1F9D2	👦👦👦	`1F9D1 200D 1F9D2 200D 1F9D2 ; family: adult, child, child`
🧑‍🧑‍🧒	1F9D1 200D 1F9D1 200D 1F9D2	👦👦👦	`1F9D1 200D 1F9D1 200D 1F9D2 ; family: adult, adult, child`

👪	`1F9D1 200D 1F9D1 200D`
	`1F9D2 200D 1F9D2`
		👩👦👦👦	`1F9D1 200D 1F9D1 200D 1F9D2`
			`200D 1F9D2 ; family: adult,`
			`adult, child, child`

These new, gender-inclusive RGI additions for family emojis will enable any vendor to **_both_** adopt the newly-designed glyphs **_and also_** to enable users to emit the new family emojis glyphs without making arbitrary and unintentional statements on gender identity.

Existing Gender Inclusive Family 👪

Although there is an existing gender-inclusive family emoji: `U+1F46A` 👪 `FAMILY`, software vendors implement differing designs for this character, ranging from 3 people to 6 people present in the glyph with various skintones, genders, and other color presentations. There is a tentative design change recommendation currently being discussed by the Unicode software vendors, which is expected to be released in a future proposal. Until then, it is the recommendation of the Emoji Subcommittee that vendors adopt one of the recommended silhouette designs proposed by document L2/22-276 that most appropriately matches their outgoing design. Additionally, the category of `U+1F46A` 👪 `FAMILY` should be changed to "symbol" (currently "people") on vendor keyboards.