



**United Nations**

Department of  
Economic and  
Social Affairs

EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON  
ASSESSING THE STATUS OF IMPLEMENTATION  
OF THE ICPD PROGRAMME OF ACTION AND ITS  
CONTRIBUTION TO THE FOLLOW-UP AND REVIEW  
OF THE 2030 AGENDA

(Hybrid meeting)  
New York, 19-20 July 2023

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## SESSION III NOTES

**DAY 1: Wednesday, 19 July 2023**

**Session III: Global population growth and sustainable development**

### Background

This session consists of two interconnected components: Part A focuses on the relationships between population growth and the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development; and Part B focuses on the progress and challenges in achieving gender equality and sexual and reproductive health, including family planning during the post-Cairo era.

### Part A: Population growth and sustainable development

The global population has experienced unprecedented growth since 1950, reaching a milestone of 8 billion in 2022, and is projected to continue to grow until the end of this century due to the global decline in mortality and the persistence of high levels of fertility in many low- and lower-middle-income countries. The pace of population growth has significantly slowed since around 1970, and much of the growth in the coming decades will result from the momentum built from previous high fertility and rapid growth.

Most high- and upper-middle-income countries, which are either at the late stage or have already completed the demographic transition, are experiencing population ageing, slow population growth, or even population decline in some parts of Europe and East Asia. By contrast, many low- and lower-middle-income countries are still experiencing rapid population growth, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. This adds to the difficulties that these countries face in addressing multiple development challenges, including to eradicate poverty, reduce inequalities and to promote sustained and inclusive economic growth. However, as fertility declines, the ensuing rise of the share of the population in the working ages creates a change in the age structure favourable to reap a demographic dividend, i.e., increased per capita economic growth, especially if investments in health, education, and employment are put in place.

Unsustainable consumption and production patterns have generated environmental damage and fuelled the climate crisis. Both the high- and upper-middle-income countries that have contributed more damage to the environment in the past and the low- and lower-middle-income



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countries whose populations are growing faster have responsibilities to reduce environmental damage, and to combat climate change while raising the living standards of the world's population in a sustainable and inclusive manner (United Nations, 2021).

### **Part B: Gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights**

During the post-Cairo era, the international community has committed to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, and the realization of reproductive rights for all people. The basic right of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children, recognized by the ICPD Programme of Action, has been reaffirmed in the 2030 Agenda, which includes SDG target 3.7: By 2030, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies. While much progress has been achieved over the past three decades, the empowerment of women, gender equality and universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services still remain an “unfinished business” in many parts of the world.

#### **Guiding Questions:**

##### Part A: Population growth and sustainable development

- What are the best practices and key lessons from the post-Cairo experiences in integrating population issues with sustainable development at the country, regional and global levels?
- Based on experiences during the past two decades, what are the key challenges for sub-Saharan African countries to reap the demographic dividend?
- How can low- and lower-middle income countries sustain increased socioeconomic well-being of their population without adversely impacting the environment and climate change?

##### Part B: Gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights

- What are the successful experiences and best practices in implementing the ICPD Programme of Action regarding gender equality, equity and the empowerment of women?
- How can the ICPD Programme of Action contribute to address the intersections between sexual and reproductive health and other areas of development, such as education, poverty reduction, and gender equality?
- Given the emerging challenges and changing social dynamics, how can governments and stakeholders continue to promote women's reproductive rights and decision-making power, including the right to choose the number, timing and spacing of their children?

## Reference

United Nations (2021). Global Population Growth and Sustainable Development. UN DESA/POP/2021/TR/NO.2. Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Available at: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/global-population-growth>.