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**Population and sustainable development, in
particular sustained and inclusive economic growth**

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The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

¹ The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

The world population has surpassed the 7 billion mark and is projected to grow to over 9 billion by 2043.

Population trends today are characterized by an increasing divergence across countries and regions. Whereas many of the poorer countries continue to be characterized by rapid population growth, others that are more advanced in their demographic transition are experiencing rapid population ageing and even population decline in some cases. Furthermore, the world is witnessing increasingly complex international migration patterns and many countries continue to experience very high rates of urbanization.

These population dynamics influence development at the national and sub-national levels, but also at regional and global levels.

According to the official ICPD release, the conference delegates achieved consensus on the following four qualitative and quantitative goals:

1. Universal education: Universal primary education in all countries. Urge countries to provide women with a wider access to secondary and higher-level education as well as vocational and technical training.
2. Reduction of infant and child mortality. Countries should strive to reduce infant and under-5 child mortality rates by one-third or to 50–70 deaths per 1,000.
3. Reduction of maternal mortality. Disparities in maternal mortality within countries and between geographical regions, socio-economic and ethnic groups should be narrowed.
4. Access to reproductive and sexual health services including family planning. Counseling, pre-natal care, safe delivery and post-natal care, prevention and appropriate treatment of infertility, prevention of abortion and the management of the consequences of abortion, treatment of reproductive tract infections, sexually transmitted diseases and other reproductive health conditions; education, counseling, as appropriate, on human sexuality, reproductive health and responsible parenthood.

Towards effective implementation of 2030 Agenda

It is worthy of note that the major shifts in population age structures are signs of success reflecting higher rates of survival from childhood to adulthood and longer life spans, and the greater ability of couples to choose the number and timing of any children they desire. This was backed up in 2016, during an expert group meeting of UN DESA's Population Division that highlighted the policies Member States are already implementing to adapt to these changing demographic circumstances. In ageing societies, social protection mechanisms, pension systems and health care programmes are being adjusted and strengthened.

Women's participation in the workforce should be supported more than ever before, so that countries could slowly push up the age of retirement. At the same time, there should be an increase in recognition for international migration which can help to rejuvenate populations and slow the rate of population ageing.

Furthermore, there is a necessity to invest in the human capital of populations, especially the youth, through policies and programmes to improve youth's access to education, health, and employment.

Additionally, attention should be given to the reproductive health needs of youth, as well as to the prevention of adolescent pregnancy, child and early marriage, violence against youth and gender-based violence.

At the same time, countries should detail their policies and programmes to address the health, welfare and inclusion of their rapidly growing older populations.

Member States' attention should be drawn to issues of migration and refugee movements which present a unique challenge relating to the changing population age distributions, the introduction of new cultural practices, and to labour markets.

Finally, countries should further stress the importance of improving data and statistics for monitoring demographic trends and development, and capacity development.

Why population dynamics matters for sustainable development

Population growth, population ageing and decline, as well as migration and urbanization, affect virtually all development objectives that are on top of national and global development agendas. They affect consumption, production, employment, income distribution, poverty and social protections, including pensions; they also complicate the efforts to ensure universal access to health, education, housing, sanitation, water, food and energy.

Population growth in particular places is increasing pressures on the planet's resources – water, forests, land and the earth's atmosphere – contributing to climate change and challenging environmental sustainability. However, population dynamics do not only affect critical development objectives; they are themselves affected by social, economic and environmental changes.

Population dynamics do not only pose challenges, they also provide important opportunities for more sustainable development. A decline in fertility levels and slower population growth, for example, lead to an increased concentration of the population in the working age range, which can enable countries to reap a demographic bonus and jumpstart economic development.

Migration can be an important enabler of social and economic development. Today, more than a billion people rely on international and internal migration to escape from poverty and conflict, adapt to environmental and economic shocks, and improve the income, health, and education of their families.

Urbanization can be a powerful driver of sustainable development. Higher population density enables governments to easily deliver essential infrastructure and services in urban areas at relatively low cost per capita. Livable and sustainable cities have knock-on effects in terms of providing rural populations with greater access to services such as education and healthcare, while also empowering them economically.

However, the benefits of demographic transitions, urbanization and migration do not materialize automatically. Whether population dynamics pose challenges or bring opportunities depends largely on the policies that are in force.

How to address the challenges and harness the opportunities of population dynamics to promote sustainable development

Population dynamics are the result of individual choices and opportunities. To address and harness the opportunities of population dynamics for sustainable development, countries should seek to enlarge, not restrict, individual rights. Countries should work to expand people's choices, resourcefulness, creativity and resilience by adopting policies that are human rights-based and gender-responsive.

Human rights-based and gender-responsive policies – such as promoting universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, including voluntary family planning, and to education, including comprehensive sexuality education – can make a significant difference for people and societies. Together, these measures help

to avoid unwanted pregnancies, reduce teenage pregnancies, curb infant and maternal mortality, and reduce gender-based violence and unsafe abortions. They also help to combat HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, which continue to claim millions of lives every year.

Rights-based and gender-responsive policies are also critical in a context of low fertility and rapid population ageing or population decline. Policies addressing low fertility should promote a better work-life balance and ensure access to essential services, such as childcare and social protections. Furthermore, non-discriminatory policies are important to allow older persons to contribute fully to society while at the same time receiving the care, services and social protections they need. Fiscal policies, social protections and non-financial support systems for families can influence decisions about family size.

A human rights approach is crucial in migration policies, which should be designed in full respect for and protection of migrants and migrant workers' human rights. Such policies can generate large economic and social gains from migration while ensuring decent living and working conditions for migrants as well as a rights-based approach in choosing policies for addressing urbanization and sustainable settlement patterns.

Development agenda should reflect the actions needed to harness the opportunities that population dynamics present to sustainable development

In today's world there is no place for coercive measures of population control or for setting demographic targets. Such policies are contrary to the respect for human rights.

The wide consultations on population dynamics have suggested unequivocally the importance of mainstreaming the following priorities in the development agenda:

1. Strengthen the formation of human capital throughout the life course, with a particular focus on health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights; education, including comprehensive sexuality education; and poverty reduction, decent work and social protections; as well as a particular emphasis on human rights, non-discrimination, equal opportunities, women's empowerment and youth participation.
2. To seize the benefits that can come with population ageing, countries will need to promote the active and healthy ageing of the older persons. This calls for adequate access to social protections, including pensions and health care, as well as investment in continuing education and lifelong learning, complemented by policies that counter discrimination against older persons.
3. The means of harnessing the opportunities offered by population dynamics will need to rely on more effective and stronger global, regional and national partnerships with an emphasis on knowledge sharing, and on technical and financial assistance that will enable countries to adopt evidence – and rights-based policies informed by population data, projections and analysis.