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Population, education and sustainable development

Statement submitted by the Hellenic Association of Political Scientists and Kallipatira, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council¹

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

During the last century, the international community has drawn its attention towards climate change and the need to establish a common framework that would be able to ensure human's prosperity and the environment's viability. In fact, recent natural disasters all over the world and the deterioration of living conditions in a number of Least Developed Countries have made this necessity even more imperative. Under this context, it is well known that contemporary and superficial policies are no longer efficient since they create a vicious circle of problems that are constantly growing and solutions that only harbour them.

International actors under the ultimate goal of sustainable development have established a whole new framework that aims to correlate prosperity with preservation. The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals have laid the foundations of common policies and goals that national governments and international actors have to implement in order to keep up with the current environmental and social needs. United Nations and other international organizations' actions towards sustainable development make clear the necessity for a collective and concerted response to the challenge that climate change and human activity poses today.

Among the most influencing factors of sustainable development is population which constitutes a significant and multidimensional dynamic. This is evident if we take into consideration that in order to achieve zero poverty and equal access to opportunities respecting at the same time the environment, the mobilization and the awareness of the world population is necessary. In fact, world population is simultaneously a means and an end in itself of sustainable development. This is relevant to the fact that on the one hand, it actually forms the human capital for socioeconomic growth and on the other, it is the main target of sustainable development as the latter aims to human well-being. Population is directly linked to a number of aspects such as climate crisis, reproductive health, child mortality, distribution of economic resources and education. These aspects differ from country to country and as a result international actors need to identify the current needs and difficulties that each state has to face so that policies respond effectively to them.

Undoubtedly, education forms the most influential and determinant factor that is simultaneously linked to positive population trends. In fact, it is the most efficient investment of all development goals because it provides people with the necessary skills to achieve a better and, at the same time, a sustainable way of living. The various approaches and the decision-making should also reflect the needs and the capabilities of each society which means that international community should, on the one hand, consider how to achieve "inclusive and equitable quality education" in Least Developing Countries according to Goal 4, and on the other, how to promote and integrate the Sustainable Development Goals in higher education in developed countries.

Under this context, The Hellenic Association of Political Scientists and Kallipatira applaud and are willing to further support the United Nations' strategy towards the implementation and promotion of the Sustainable Development Goals. We strongly believe that population and education should go hand in hand and constitute the priority of political initiatives and decision-making. For this reason, there is no other way than recognizing that available data, social and economic conditions and human behaviour play a major role in the formation of sustainable solutions and the confrontation of current challenges.

States and international actors have to invest in statistical data and research in order to address their most challenging affairs in an effective way. For instance,

underdeveloped countries have to identify populations that are most affected by and contribute to environmental degradation. Authorities and local non-governmental organizations would then channel grants and funds to populations' more urgent needs. Certainly, this does not mean that current policies are ineffective or deficient, but that there is an imperative need for customized and pertinent approaches. Since demographic and behavioural characteristics of each population are different, so should be the sustainable development policies.

Towards a parallel direction, The Hellenic Association of Political Scientists and Kallipatira recognize and take into consideration the determinant role of younger generations towards the direction of sustainability. Enhancing younger generations' interest in the environment and participation in social life should be one of the main policy targets of decision makers. Consequently, human – centred policies should begin from investing in education and ensuring equitable and widespread access to education systems. In turn, younger generations will be capable of improving important social trends such as combatting poverty, achieving inclusive economic development and adopting greener and more sustainable patterns in their way of living. Investing in younger generations and their mental and personal evolution can have long-term effects in social prosperity.

In general, a fact that is vitally important to be taken into consideration is that sustainable development is not a static procedure or a fixed whole of decisions and approaches which could be arbitrarily implemented in communities. In fact, it is a vibrant and constantly changing framework that needs to adapt and respond to certain dynamics. This framework demands international cooperation approaches and collective decision-making as well as the mobilization of populations all around the world in order to be implemented. Significant initiatives are currently paving the way to sustainable development but a lot more is yet to be done.

The Hellenic Association of Political Scientists and Kallipatira are grateful for having had the opportunity to express their views on the topic of the fifty-sixth session of the Commission on Population and Development.
