



2018 ECOSOC Integration Segment, 1-3 May 2018
Innovative communities: leveraging technology and innovation
to build sustainable and resilient societies

Contribution from the Commission on Population and Development
(51st session, 7 April 2017 and 9-13 April 2018)

I. Introduction

The Commission on Population and Development held its 51th session in New York from 9 to 13 April 2018. The special theme of the session was “Sustainable cities, human mobility and international migration”. Participants included delegations from 42 elected members of the Commission and observers from 72 other Member States, two non-Member States, several intergovernmental organizations, UN regional commissions, and other entities of the UN system. Roughly 125 representatives from around 80 non-governmental organizations participated as well. Member States shared national experiences of implementation through their statements in the plenary meetings.

Member States also participated in informal consultations on a draft resolution on the special theme of the session. To allow sufficient time for Member States to discuss the draft resolution and decisions, three days of informal consultations (27 and 29 March and 6 April) were held prior to the official resumption of the session on 9 April. Further consultations during the week of 9-13 April revealed many areas of agreement, as well as some topics on which delegations continued to express divergent views. The Chair’s final text, proposed on 13 April as a compromise intended to bridge the remaining gaps, included language on the special theme and related topics that had been agreed in the Commission or other UN bodies. Nevertheless, some delegations could not agree to move forward with the proposed language on sexual and reproductive health. The absence of a strong sovereignty clause that had been present in the adopted resolutions of recent years but rejected this year by a number of countries, was also an obstacle to consensus. As a result, no consensus was achieved, and the Chair withdrew his proposed text.

Although the Commission failed to achieve a consensus around the draft resolution on the special theme, the session's documentation and deliberations provide useful information on means of building sustainable and resilient societies in the context of an increasingly mobile world with growing numbers of urban dwellers and international migrants. Throughout the recent session, Member States expressed broad agreement on several key aspects of this topic.

II. Sustainable cities, human mobility and resilience

A growing proportion of humanity is concentrated in urban settlements, and it is expected that most population growth in the future will be reflected in the increasing size of urban areas, especially in the less developed regions. The increasing concentration of populations in cities poses both opportunities and challenges in terms of housing, infrastructure, basic services, food security, health, education, decent jobs, safety and natural resources, among others.

The movement of people from rural to urban areas, between urban settlements of various sizes and from one country to another will continue to affect the distribution of the human population within and across national boundaries. Urbanization and migration are inextricably linked to the process of sustainable development and can contribute, if well managed, to achieving the objectives of the 2030 development agenda. However, mobile populations often live in vulnerable situations and lack the resilience needed to deal with challenging and changing conditions.

Cities are common sites of destination and transit for internal and international migrants, and a large number and proportion of international migrants arrive in destination countries via large metropolitan areas known as "gateway cities". Well-managed urbanization can help residents to reap the benefits of agglomeration while minimizing the potential adverse consequences of urban growth. Cities can promote resilience among inhabitants by providing access to jobs and improved housing and living conditions, and by investing in education and health. Such measures strengthen the ability of city dwellers to participate in economic activities and to build up the personal resources and capacities needed to adapt to a changing social and physical environment.

Local authorities and communities play a key role in promoting sustainable urban development and supporting the integration of migrants into host communities. Urban planning and design should anticipate the expected growth of urban populations in the coming decades, including growing numbers of urban poor. Effective participation and collaboration among all relevant stakeholders, including local governments and the communities they serve, improves the resilience of those communities and strengthens their capacity for adaptation to changing conditions.

III. Diverse situations: the importance of data and capacity building

Countries are facing diverse situations over the coming decades regarding population growth rates, changing age structures and shifts in the spatial distribution of their populations (including between rural and urban areas), and in the size and direction of international migration flows affecting their populations. In this situation, there are no one-size-fits-all policy prescriptions.

Therefore, the availability of timely and reliable demographic data, disaggregated according to key characteristics of individuals, is essential for planning and implementing policies and programmes to promote sustainable urbanization. Improvements in the capacity to collect, disseminate and analyse relevant data and statistics, and to produce population projections at the global, regional, national and subnational levels, can facilitate evidence-based policymaking for sustainable and resilient societies and support the monitoring of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

Partnerships between governments, international organizations, regional organizations and civil society can help to promote capacity building and technical cooperation, including South-South cooperation. By developing innovative programmes and methodologies, and by providing technical assistance to improve the collection, dissemination and analysis of data on sustainable cities, human mobility and international migration at national, regional and local levels, such partnerships can contribute to building sustainable and resilient societies.

IV. Recommendations

In a rapidly urbanizing world it is vital that Governments promote the principles and the practice of sustainable cities in order to address social, economic and environmental issues and to reduce the vulnerability of the low-income sectors of society to the risks posed by natural disasters and environmental change. The support of the international donor community is indispensable, helping developing countries to increase the capacity and competence of city and municipal authorities to manage urban development and respond to the need of all citizens for a safe, healthy, inclusive and secure environment.

Evidence-based decision-making at both national and local levels is a foundation of good governance and the overall efficient management of social and economic affairs. Population data disaggregated by age, sex, geographical location and migratory status are essential. Both the collection and the use of data from civil registration, vital statistics and health information systems, as well as from censuses, household surveys, population registers and other relevant administrative data sources, should be strengthened.

The mobility of people, whether between rural and urban areas, or within and between countries, is a topic in need of better understanding. This is especially true concerning migratory patterns to and from cities, effects of migration on vulnerability and resilience, and linkages between urban areas and places of origin. Enhancing the role and capacity of national, subnational and local governments in data collection, mapping, analysis and dissemination is an important step toward achieving this goal.