

E c o n o m i c &

S o c i a l A f f a i r s

**United Nations Expert Panel on “Integrating
population issues into sustainable development,
including in the post-2015 development agenda”**

New York, 22 January 2015

Report of the Meeting



United Nations

Department of Economic and Social Affairs
Population Division

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PREFACE

The Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) of the United Nations Secretariat provides substantive support to the Commission on Population and Development, a functional commission of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. During its annual session, the deliberations of the Commission include consideration of a special theme, which has typically been selected based on a chapter of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. The Commission's special theme for its forty-eighth session, held in April 2015, was "Realizing the future we want: integrating population issues into sustainable development, including in the post-2015 development agenda".

To contribute to the preparations and deliberations of the forty-eighth session of the Commission, the Population Division convened an expert panel on "Integrating population issues into sustainable development, including in the post-2015 development agenda", which took place at the United Nations Headquarters in New York on 22 January 2015. The purpose of the expert panel was to present and discuss the state of scientific knowledge on the main substantive issues to be addressed during the upcoming session of the Commission.

The expert panel was organized in two substantive sessions. The first session focused on population dynamics, economic development and poverty, while the second session was devoted to population, resources, the environment and climate change. Three experts made presentations in each session. The main points of the presentations and discussions from each session of the expert panel are summarized in this report.

This report, as well as other information on population trends and related development processes, can be accessed via the official website of the Population Division, www.unpopulation.org. For further information concerning this and other publications, please contact the Office of the Director, Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations DC2-1950, New York, NY 10017, USA; telephone: +1 212-963-3209; fax: +1 212-963-2147; email: population@un.org.

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I. OPENING OF THE MEETING

The meeting was opened by H.E. Ms. Bénédicte Frankinet, Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations and Chair of the forty-eighth session of the Commission on Population and Development, and by the Director of the Population Division, Mr. John Wilmoth. After welcoming the participants from Member States and various organizations, Ambassador Frankinet highlighted the importance of population-related issues in the post-2015 development agenda. She thanked the Population Division of the United Nations for inviting qualified experts, and explained that the *raison d'être* of the expert panel was to make a substantive contribution to the forthcoming session of the Commission on Population and Development (CPD), which would take place from 13 to 17 April 2015. She hoped that the expert panel would contribute to improving the quality of the debate and the outcome of the upcoming session of the CPD, providing an opportunity to brief members of the Commission and others on substantive issues related to the special theme of the Commission's forty-eighth session.

In his opening presentation, Mr. Wilmoth gave an overview of major global population trends, highlighting their linkages to the post-2015 development agenda. The presentation provided an overview of the demographic background against which the development agenda would unfold in the decades to come. Over the next fifteen years, the world's population would increase by an amount just below the current population of Africa. The projections by the United Nations indicated that, despite the declining rate of population increase, demographic stabilization or decline would be unlikely by the end of the 21st century. Population growth over the next fifteen years would be concentrated in low-income and lower-middle-income countries, with low-income countries experiencing the fastest growth.

These demographic changes would indeed bring a series of challenges for countries, which would need to expand economic output while at the same time ensuring that basic needs are met for a growing number of people, including a growing number of young people. Over the coming decades, however, the size of the youth population would level off, with the exception of Africa where youth cohorts would continue to increase in size. The projected decline in the number of children and the levelling-off in the size of the youth and adult populations would result in growing proportions of older persons. Population ageing is becoming a universal phenomenon, requiring appropriate planning to ensure healthy ageing and income security in old-age, including universal pension coverage. Despite the challenges ahead, the growing proportions of older persons throughout the world are a major global demographic trend that reflects considerable progress in human development. In sum, Mr. Wilmoth noted that recent and future population trends would strongly influence the realization of the sustainable development agenda.

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II. INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE ON “POPULATION DYNAMICS, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND POVERTY”

Ms. Jocelyn Finlay, Director of Research at the Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies, made a presentation on the economic and health benefits that can be gained by countries and individuals from the decline in fertility that occurs as part of the demographic transition. Over the course

of this transition, as fertility begins to fall, the size of the population continues to increase, but most of the increase is concentrated in the working ages. The increased weight of the working-age population as a fraction of the total creates the essential conditions for a demographic dividend. Thus, the fertility decline entails changes in the population age structure that result in a temporary bulge in the working ages. Such a change constitutes a time-bound demographic window of opportunity, a period that is conducive to rapid economic growth and social development. However, the increase in the share of working-age persons also poses a series of challenges, including with regard to the availability of sufficient job opportunities matching the skills of the ever-growing population of potential workers. The changes in the population structure unfolding during the demographic transition give countries a unique opportunity to invest in human capital, health, social infrastructure and economic development. However, because the demographic window of opportunity must ultimately come to an end, countries need to prepare for what lies ahead, in particular with regard to promoting sufficient savings to support an ageing population.

Aside from the mechanical effects of a changing population age structure over the course of the demographic transition, important changes in behaviour also take place. The decline in fertility often allows more women to pursue and reach higher levels of education and to join the labour force. These transformations lead to important health benefits, especially in maternal health as women have fewer and more widely spaced births, thereby contributing to lower child and maternal mortality and to an improved health status of infants and children. Thus, the fertility transition contributes to a series of changes, creating benefits that extend well beyond changes in the balance between age groups within a population. The present and upcoming challenge is for countries that have recently experienced a fertility decline to harness fully the various benefits of the demographic window of opportunity during the post-2015 period.

Reiterating the importance of recognizing the potential offered by the demographic window of opportunity, Ms. Sajeda Amin, Senior Associate of the Population Council in New York, focused her presentation on the importance of investing in the lives of adolescent girls during the demographic transition. Today's 500 million girls at ages 5-19 will become the women of tomorrow. Their behaviours, especially their reproductive behaviours, will influence the population trends of the next fifteen years and beyond. Large benefits can be reaped from investing in adolescent girls, especially in their education. Research shows that it is during adolescence that girls are most likely to drop out of school due to biological factors and other socio-cultural processes. Investing in girls' education is one of the best ways to realize the demographic dividend. It directly contributes to the decline of fertility as well as to supporting greater female labour force participation. Conversely, evidence shows that dropping out of school is associated with a higher probability of child marriage and early motherhood, with ensuing negative consequences for the girls or young women and for society at large. In short, investing in girls is imperative for the achievement of sustainable development.

The last presentation in the first session was by Mr. Parfait Eloundou-Enyengue, Professor of Development Sociology at Cornell University, who focused on the importance of going beyond the population averages that are usually referenced in discussions of the linkages between population and sustainable development. He noted the importance of recognizing that populations are composed of individuals that need food, education, housing, jobs and, in general, opportunities to develop. This recognition entails acknowledging differences between and within countries. These distributional aspects are critical, especially demographic inequality and the age structure of a population. Large socio-economic differentials in fertility are well documented, and they in turn contribute significantly to increased overall inequality. When unchecked by proactive policies and change in behaviour, these

processes can produce a vicious circle of inequality and poverty. Demographic inequality therefore affects the realization of various sustainable development goals (SDGs), such as ending poverty, achieving quality education for all, gender equality, sustainable economic growth, and even the attainment of peaceful and inclusive societies.

Following the three presentations, the participants addressed a series of questions on the demographic window of opportunity and the demographic dividend, on the role of the family in providing a safety net for the growing population of older persons, and on the importance of integrating the multiple factors that contribute to present and future demographic development. In their answers, the experts noted that whereas the demographic window of opportunity opens during the demographic transition, benefitting from the demographic dividend is not automatic. Countries need to embrace this opportunity by making the necessary investments in health and education, as well as other policies to enable sustained economic growth.

It was emphasized that over the course of the demographic transition, the window of opportunity first opens and then eventually closes. As a result, the problems associated initially with a large youth population shift toward those linked to population ageing. Given the foreseeable demographic dynamics, societies and governments can and should plan ahead and act before it is too late. In many societies across the world, the family remains an important part of the safety net for people at virtually all ages. However, family-based transfers and other forms of support rely on an implicit contract between the generations, which is not easily enforceable and can change over time. Considering the observed changes in demography, education, labour force participation and urbanization, among others, it remains to be seen whether such a contract will continue to hold in the future, and if so in what form. Investments in public support systems and in personal savings should go together with the increased social acceptance of the fact that children are not always able to look after their parents in their old age.

III. INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE ON “POPULATION, RESOURCES, THE ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE”

Ms. Lori Hunter, Professor of Sociology at the University of Colorado at Boulder, participated in the expert panel remotely, through videoconference services. Her presentation was on migration and urbanization and their links to the United Nations proposal for a set of sustainable development goals (SDGs). She drew on extensive research to demonstrate the aforementioned links and to show how population dynamics can influence the relationship between other development goals.

Ms. Hunter referred to various SDGs connected to population dynamics, resource use and the environment. She spoke of goal 13 (“to take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts”) in relation to concerns about ‘climate refugees’, a topic that has often been oversimplified in the media. A series of factors (social, political, economic, etc.) affect individual decisions to migrate, together with climate change or other environmental events. Indeed, the available empirical evidence suggests that in most situations climate change does not result in increased migration but rather in adaptation in place. Furthermore, much of the environmentally-induced migration takes place within countries, and therefore has little impact on the political discussion around movements of refugees and other international migrants. In order to “promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies” (SDG 16), Ms. Hunter argued that special attention should be given to migrants, which oftentimes are not given equal access to resources and services.

Regarding SDG 11 (“make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”), Ms. Hunter stressed the importance of considering the population dynamics of urban areas in terms of the constituent elements: natural increase and migration from other urban and rural areas. The challenges related to urbanization are indeed closely related to the sustainability of rural livelihoods, and the agglomeration of migrants in informal settlements on the fringes of cities is often associated with poverty and health deficits. In particular, some research has shown that rural-urban migration can contribute to a shift in the distribution of communicable and non-communicable diseases, and that there are important linkages between the environment, gender, the economy and health outcomes.

The second presentation, by Mr. Leiwan Jiang of the National Center for Atmospheric Research, examined the impacts of population dynamics on sustainable development, looking specifically at climate change. Population trends are at the heart of both the economic and environmental challenges of sustainable development, as well as of their solutions. Population dynamics fundamentally affect the environment through changes in the number, distribution and characteristics of populations. The anthropogenic impact on environment is usually seen as a by-product of population increase, economic growth and technological change. However, demographic heterogeneity, including by age, gender, residence, marital status, also plays a role in this connection.

Mr. Jiang noted the importance of changes in the populations of the emerging economies for emissions of carbon dioxide, the main greenhouse gas. He showed how emissions vary across population groups by area of residence, education level and other characteristics. Research suggests that population aging is associated with lower carbon dioxide emissions, whereas urbanization contributes positively to emissions. The change in household structure plays an important role as well: the reduction in average household size over the course of the demographic transition tends to increase per capita and total energy consumption. The example of India illustrated how education can play a positive role in reducing carbon dioxide emissions, and that higher levels of education also lead to lower fertility and slower population growth, thereby reinforcing the contribution to reduced emissions.

The various examples illustrated the need to account for multiple relevant factors in the analysis, not just total population growth. Changing population structures contribute differently to environmental degradation, and various sub-populations face different degrees of vulnerability. In general, the development challenges are most significant where population growth is the most rapid, human capital the lowest, and vulnerability the greatest. Development policies and programmes should therefore treat countries differently depending on their demographic characteristics and population trends.

The last presentation was by Mr. Alex de Sherbinin, Associate Director for Science Applications at the Center for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN) at Columbia University, and focused on the linkages between population dynamics, the environment and climate change. The presentation examined first the complex linkages at the local level. Understanding the linkages at the local level is much more complex than looking solely at the impact of demographic growth on the environment, because the environment will be affected by demographic changes through a series of mediating factors such as institutions, “livelihood assets” (natural capital, social capital, human capital, physical capital and financial capital) and cultural factors. Generally speaking, the condition of the local environment and natural resource base are improved by the presence of low fertility and low morbidity and mortality in the population.

Mr. de Sherbinin also addressed the linkages at the macro-level between population, development and the environment using a global metric for the environment that combines environmental health and ecosystem vitality. He showed that countries with low income and rapid population growth tend to do less well from an environmental point of view.

The last point of his presentation focused on climate change, vulnerability and adaptation. Through a series of examples taken from the Mekong delta in Viet Nam, the coastal areas in West Africa, and hot-spots mapping across the globe, the vulnerability of a population to environmental hazards was discussed. He concluded that population dynamics are an integral part of understanding climate vulnerability and planning for adaptation. Because many of the effects take place at the local level, there is a need for geo-referenced census data with higher resolution to map better the geography of vulnerability. Finally, he noted that while it is important to recognize the limits of the earth's resources and its ability to sustain an ever-growing population, it is also important to acknowledge that the most pessimistic views about the earth's "carrying capacity" have proven over time to have been grossly exaggerated. What is certain, however, is that humanity is entering a period about which we still know very little, and it is therefore prudent to be aware of the potential environmental constraints.

Following the three presentations, the participants responded to a series of questions on the role of urbanization in carbon dioxide emissions and the specific role of population dynamics and technology, as well as questions on the timing of the peak in global population growth and related challenges. In their answers, the experts summarized the methodological approach to estimate the contribution of urbanization in future emissions. Models based on current patterns of labour productivity and consumption patterns in urban and rural areas help to understand the contribution of demographic trends, particularly aging and urbanization, to global CO₂ emissions. Because population projections are more certain than projections of economic growth, technological advance and energy efficiency, it is relatively easier to quantify the impact of demography on future carbon dioxide emissions than to foresee the impact of changes in labour productivity or consumer behaviours. Given the greater inertia of population dynamics, there is more room to manoeuvre on the side of policies aimed at influencing patterns of consumption and production, especially in the short-term.

IV. CLOSING OF THE MEETING

Following the questions from participants and answers from the experts, Mr. John Wilmoth thanked H.E. Ms. Bénédicte Frankinet and the other members of the Bureau of the Commission on Population and Development, especially the Vice-Chair from the Islamic Republic of Iran, who had suggested and encouraged the organization of this expert panel on "Integrating population issues into sustainable development, including in the post-2015 development agenda" in preparation for the upcoming session of the Commission.

Finally, in closing the meeting, H.E. Ms. Bénédicte Frankinet thanked the United Nations Population Division for organizing the event and for convening highly competent experts who had offered informative presentations on these important, complex and interrelated issues. The invited speakers were also acknowledged for their active contributions to the panel discussions.

Date and time: 22 January 2015, 10am – 1pm.

Venue: New York (CR5, Conference Building)

Structure: One half-day meeting (3 hours), divided as follows:

Agenda

- Opening Remarks
 - H.E. Ms. Bénédicte Frankinet, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Permanent Representative, Belgium
- Brief overview of major population trends
 - Mr. John Wilmoth, Director, Population Division/DESA
- Session 1: Inter-active dialogue on “Population dynamics, economic development, and poverty”
 - Ms. Jocelyn Finlay, Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies
 - Ms. Sajeda Amin, The Population Council, New York
 - Mr. Parfait Eloundou-Enyegue, Cornell University
 - Moderator: Mr. John Wilmoth
- Session 2: Inter-active dialogue on “Population, resources, the environment, and climate change”
 - Ms. Lori Hunter, University of Colorado at Boulder
 - Mr. Leiwan Jiang, National Center for Atmospheric Research
 - Mr. Alex de Sherbinin, Columbia University
 - Moderator: Mr. John Wilmoth
- Closing Remarks
 - H.E. Ms. Bénédicte Frankinet, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Permanent Representative, Belgium