



# Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
31 March 2021

English only

---

## Commission on Population and Development

### Fifty-fourth session

19–23 April 2021

Item 5 of the provisional agenda\*

### Future role and organization of the Commission on Population and Development

## Future role and organization of the Commission on Population and Development

### Note prepared by the Secretariat

#### *Summary*

At its fifty-third session, the Commission on Population and Development decided to add an item on the future role and organization of Commission to the agenda of its fifty-fourth session.

The present note has been prepared by the Population Division of UN DESA, in consultation the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), on the basis of contributions received from Member States as well as from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Contributions were made during two virtual consultations, one with Member States and one with NGOs. Inputs were also provided in writing.

The note presents the findings from the consultation process and puts forward a set of recommendations to strengthen the work of the Commission. The Commission may wish to consider the findings and the recommendations of this note during its deliberations under agenda item 5 of the provisional agenda.

---

\* E/CN.9/2021/1.

## I. Introduction

1. The Commission on Population and Development, at its fifty-third session, decided to include an agenda item on the future role and organization of the Commission in the provisional agenda for its fifty-fourth session. This agenda item was added for three main reasons.

- First, and pursuant to General Assembly resolution 72/305, it would allow the Commission to assess the continued need for annual negotiated outcomes and to ensure that, when it produces such outcomes, they are effective and action-oriented and result in increased levels of cooperation (paragraph 30).
- Second, it would permit the Commission to evaluate its response to ECOSOC resolution 2016/25, which requests the Commission to, inter alia, maintain the technical quality of the Commission (paragraph 5), to afford the opportunity for NGOs to actively participate in the work of the Commission (paragraph 9), and to adequately reflect the regional dimensions in the Commission's deliberations (paragraph 14).
- Third, it would encourage the Commission to reflect on the challenges it has been facing in recent years in reaching consensus on a resolution on the special theme of the Commission and to explore how this situation could be avoided in the future.

2. To inform the reflection on this item, the Secretariat prepared a background note under the auspices of the Bureau of the fifty-third session.<sup>1</sup> In the note, Member States were invited to respond in writing to the following three questions:

- a) Given that the Commission is the only intergovernmental forum focused on the implementation of the Programme of Action of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in the United Nations, how can we improve its work to better assist Member States and the international community at large in advancing the ICPD agenda while contributing to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?
- b) Population and development issues and trends, including drivers and impacts, have important implications for the further implementation of the Programme of Action and the achievement of the SDGs. What role can the Commission play in guiding Member States and the international community in responding to these issues and trends?
- c) In order to address the above questions and issues, would it be desirable or feasible for the Commission to adjust its methods of work (organizational aspects, substantive elements, outcome)? If so, could the practices and experiences of other subsidiary bodies of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) provide any guidance?

---

<sup>1</sup> Note prepared by the Secretariat.

3. At the time this conference room paper was prepared, 33 Member States and 12 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in consultative status with ECOSOC had provided written inputs.<sup>2</sup>

4. To complement the written inputs, the Bureau of the fifty-fourth session convened two virtual informal meetings on the future role and organization of the Commission on Population and Development.<sup>3</sup> The first meeting, convening Member States, was held on 28 January 2021. In total, 117 Member States registered for the event as well as 13 intergovernmental organizations and 57 NGOs. The second meeting, convening NGOs in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, was held on 12 February 2021. A total of 39 NGOs participated in the second meeting, while 30 Member States and 2 intergovernmental organizations attended as observers.

5. Both Member States and NGOs expressed appreciation to the Chair and the Bureau of the fifty-third session for initiating the discussion on the future role and organization of the Commission. They also thanked the Chair and the Bureau of the fifty-fourth session for the inclusive and transparent process in which contributions to the discussion had been solicited. NGOs expressed the hope that the current and future Chairs and Bureaux of the Commission would continue the practice of seeking the views of NGOs in preparing the annual session.

---

<sup>2</sup> See [www.un.org/development/dea/pd/content/future-role-and-organization](http://www.un.org/development/dea/pd/content/future-role-and-organization).

<sup>3</sup> Summaries are available from [www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/future-role-and-organization](http://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/future-role-and-organization).

## II. Summary of inputs and contributions

### A. Preparation of the Commission's annual session

#### *Introduction*

6. Delegations voiced strong support for the Commission as the only intergovernmental body mandated to follow up on the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), held in Cairo, Egypt in 1994. Member States highlighted the importance of the work of the Commission, underlined by the adoption of the declaration on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Conference. The Programme of Action remained an important basis for global action, given that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development did not cover all its objectives and actions and that many of its objectives had yet to be achieved. There was a call for strengthening the Commission's normative role.

7. Some responses emphasized the importance of the participation of representatives of least developed countries and other developing countries in the work of the Commission.

8. Some respondents indicated that resolutions adopted by the Commission carried significant political weight and were critical in driving policy change at the regional, national and local levels. For instance, previous resolutions had helped to harmonize laws, advance modern forms of contraception, call out violence against women, and raise awareness about early marriage and other harmful practices.

#### *Advancing the ICPD agenda and achieving the SDGs*

9. There was wide recognition of the strong linkages between the Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Many countries called on the Commission to clearly reflect these linkages in its work, emphasizing the complementarity between the two agendas. Countries welcomed further alignment of the Commission's activities with the work of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), so long as the implementation of the Programme of Action remained the main focus of the Commission. Several Member States requested the Secretariat to prepare a comparative analysis ("mapping exercise") of the Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda.

#### *Contributions to ECOSOC and the General Assembly*

10. Many Member States called for giving greater attention to the work of the Commission in other intergovernmental fora, including the ECOSOC and the General Assembly as well as for increasing the visibility of the Commission's achievements at the HLPF held under the auspices of ECOSOC and the General Assembly.

11. Countries drew attention to General Assembly resolution 49/128, which stipulated that the follow-up to the implementation of the Programme of Action would be achieved through a three-tiered intergovernmental mechanism constituting the General Assembly, the ECOSOC and the Commission itself (paragraph 23). The mandate of the Commission was to monitor, review and assess the implementation of the Programme of Action (paragraph 23c), to review research findings on population and development at the national, regional and global levels,<sup>4</sup> and to advise the ECOSOC thereon. Ultimately, these

---

<sup>4</sup> E/RES/1995/55.

discussions would be brought to the attention of the General Assembly, the main deliberative and most representative intergovernmental mechanism for the formulation and appraisal of policy on population and development, which would organize a regular review of the implementation of the Programme of Action (paragraph 23a).

12. Several countries suggested that the voluntary national reviews (VNRs) of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), held in the context of the HLPF, should address the status of implementation of the Programme of Action more systematically. In turn, countries could be invited to present their VNRs during the Commission's annual session, highlighting their experiences in integrating population dimensions into national development planning.

13. It was suggested to include in the Commission's work an annual review of a few Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda that are of direct relevance to the Programme of Action and the work of the Population Division, in particular those referring to universal health coverage (SDG 3.8) and international migration (SDG 10.7). One Member State suggested that social protection (SDG 1), access to health-care services (SDG 3), education (SDG 4), gender equality (SDG 5), decent work (SDG 8), and equality and social inclusion (SDG 10) were issues of direct relevance to the work of the Commission.

14. It was suggested that the cross-cutting nature of population and development and the significance of population dynamics for sustainable development could be better reflected in the mandate and activities of the HLPF. The annual coordination meeting between the Bureau of ECOSOC and those of the functional commissions and other ECOSOC subsidiary entities was an important opportunity to highlight the interlinkages between population and sustainable development.

15. In aligning the work of the Commission with that of ECOSOC and the HLPF, some countries cautioned that the Commission should not lose sight of its main role, which is to review and appraise the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action.

16. Several NGOs suggested holding an expert meeting on the roles of all functional commissions in the context of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the ongoing discussions on the HLPF and the revitalization of the General Assembly and the ECOSOC.

#### *Enhancing the Commission's technical dimensions*

17. Many States called for strengthening the technical dimensions of the Commission's work, which should be informed by the latest scientific research and studies. The reports of the Secretary-General prepared for the annual session should be based on evidence, contain analyses of issues and trends, and include action-oriented policy recommendations that advance the implementation of the Programme of Action. Countries emphasized the need for the Population Division of UN DESA and UNFPA to coordinate the preparation of these reports. In organizing the annual session, the Population Division of UN DESA and UNFPA were encouraged to reach out to other United Nations entities and networks with relevant technical expertise, including in the preparation of the reports of the Secretary-General.

18. Some delegations suggested raising the technical content of the annual session by attracting more experts from capital and by negotiating the outcome document ahead of time. This would allow the Commission to prioritize substantive deliberations with a view to promoting mutual learning and guiding policy formulation to promote the

implementation of the Programme of Action and the achievement of the population-related SDGs.

19. Many countries highlighted the importance of the availability of reliable, high-quality, disaggregated data in assessing the status of implementation of the Programme of Action, enabling Member States to identify areas lacking in progress and to develop appropriate policy responses. There was a call for greater attention to strengthening national data systems to collect disaggregated demographic data and develop specific and innovative indicators allowing Member States to systematically assess the well-being of distinct populations, including women, children, adolescents and youth, older persons, migrants, refugees, indigenous people and people of African-descent as well as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex (LGBTI) people. Member States called for enhanced support in developing national technical capacities and for greater training opportunities for government experts. In particular, it was suggested to strengthen methodologies and develop tools to guide Member States in the integral implementation of the Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda, based on national priorities.

20. Given its tradition of data-driven, evidence-based discussions, some NGOs observed that the Commission was an important platform to advocate for disaggregated data, especially by gender. Some NGOs offered to contribute technical expertise in preparing the annual sessions.

#### *Selection of the special theme*

21. Some Member States suggested that the special theme should be clearly based on demographic trends and the Programme of Action. Countries also suggested that the annual theme of the Commission could be more closely aligned with the 2030 Agenda. One country suggested to align the annual theme with the entry points included in the 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report.

#### *Statements during the general debate*

22. In order to promote focused discussions during the general debate, it was suggested that comprehensive national statements could be uploaded on the Commission website prior to the session, with briefer oral statements heard. This would allow Member States to present statements in a concise and targeted manner during the session.

#### *Substantive preparations*

23. Member States emphasized the importance of continuing to convene expert meetings focusing on the special theme and to organize informal technical briefings ahead of the annual session.

24. A number of countries suggested convening technical panels focusing on global progress and identifying barriers to the full achievement of the Programme of Action, allowing Member States to share specific examples of policy initiatives that had delivered effectively on the specific theme of the Commission. Such panels could include speakers representing a diverse group of stakeholders from academia, civil society, the private sector and international organizations representing local, national and regional levels. These panels could prioritize women and young people as speakers and include perspectives from the Global South, bringing a critical perspective to the deliberations in the Commission. Such discussions could take place prior to the session in the form of online consultations or as part of a series of expert dialogues throughout the year allowing experts from Member States to gather all necessary information to meaningfully engage in the work of the Commission.

25. While recognizing the added value of expert panels, a few Member States stressed that panelists should be familiar with the Commission and its mandate and that they should represent the full spectrum of opinions.

26. It was suggested that the United Nations regional commissions and UNFPA country offices could play a more substantive role in showcasing regional and national perspectives during deliberations at the annual session. However, one country suggested limiting the number of panels during the annual session, given the central role of the Commission as a platform for multilateral, intergovernmental dialogue and sharing of experiences by governments.

27. Several NGOs suggested that the Population Division of UN DESA convene a technical briefing with NGOs ahead of the deadline for submitting written statements to maximize the utility of these contributions for the annual session.

#### *Regional dimensions*

28. Many Member States reaffirmed the need to adequately highlight regional dimensions in the annual session of the Commission and to showcase regional and country-based perspectives. The United Nations regional commissions and UNFPA offices could be consulted more closely in the organization of the annual session. The Commission could facilitate exchanges between regions on the follow up of the regional reviews of the Programme of Action. Some NGOs called for the establishment of accountability mechanisms for the implementation of the Programme of Action at the regional level.

29. However, other Member States recalled that some of the reviews had not adopted intergovernmentally agreed outcomes and did not reflect the views of the full membership of the United Nations. As such, these reviews could not set priorities for the Commission. These countries considered that the existing modalities allowed for a full exploration of regional dimensions through the participation of representatives of the United Nations regional commissions.

#### *Ministerial segment*

30. To raise the profile of the Commission and increase political awareness of the ICPD Programme of Action, some Member States called for including a ministerial segment in the annual session. As a minimum, the Commission could convene a high-level ministerial segment during the year it was conducting a comprehensive review of the status of the Programme of Action.

#### *Civil society participation*

31. Member States reiterated their support for a robust engagement of NGOs in the work of the Commission. Many delegates expressed support for having meaningful participation of NGOs during the general debate as well as in thematic discussions. There was also a call for greater involvement of the private sector.

32. Several countries supported a greater role for NGOs in the technical preparations of the annual session and suggested inviting NGOs as observers to the informal consultations on draft proposals.

33. Some countries proposed holding a multi-stakeholder forum or other dedicated civil society events prior to or during the annual session as was currently the practice in the

Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and the Commission for Social Development (CSocD).

34. NGOs echoed the call for their full and effective participation in the annual session. They highlighted concrete opportunities for partnerships, contained in chapter 15 of the Programme of Action, which had yet to be realized. They also drew attention to other fora, such as the Human Rights Council and high-level meetings of the General Assembly, where civil society participation was more prominent than in events organized under the auspices of the ECOSOC. In some of these fora, NGOs had been consulted on the outcome document. These NGOs suggested to hold a dedicated, half-day dialogue between Member States and NGOs prior to the annual session.

35. Some NGOs called for expanding the civic space in the Commission for women, youth, feminist and faith-based organizations, as well as for persons of African descent, indigenous women and girls, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups.

36. NGOs inquired about the possibility of organizing side-events without being sponsored by a Member State, as was already the practice in the CSocD. Such events could be included in calendar of side events maintained by the Secretariat. The issue of equitable geographic distribution of NGO representatives in the annual session was also mentioned. In this regard, NGOs stressed the importance of the availability of simultaneous interpretation in all six United Nations languages.

#### *Outcome document*

37. Member States underlined the need for the Commission to produce short, concise and action-oriented resolutions which provided practical guidance to Member States and the international community in accelerating the full and effective implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action and the achievement of relevant SDGs. Short and action-oriented resolutions could also contribute to a more constructive process of negotiations and avoid unnecessary polarizations.

38. One country suggested having different types of outcomes, including summaries of meetings, as was the practice in CSW and the United Nations Statistical Commission.

## **B. Organizational aspects**

#### *Informal consultations*

39. Several Member States suggested finalizing the consultations on the main negotiated outcome document before the start of the annual session. This could avoid parallel meetings during the formal session and allow Member States to fully participate in both informal consultations and plenary meetings. In this regard, Member States recalled the positive experience in 2019 when negotiations on the outcome document were concluded prior to the start of the annual session and the resolution was adopted during the opening meeting.<sup>5</sup> To increase the substantive level of the informal consultations, Member States called for increased participation of experts from capital.

40. Member States called for the informal consultations to be conducted in a full, open and transparent manner. Some delegations suggested that civil society and other stakeholders could participate in the informal consultations as observers. Broadcasting the

---

<sup>5</sup> Such planning would require that careful consideration be given to the scheduling of informal consultations and to allowing for sufficient time between the conclusion of CSW and the opening of CPD.



consultations on United Nations Web TV would enhance accountability and ensure greater coherence between dynamics in the plenary debate and the informal consultations.

41. While some differences on the draft outcome could be overcome through consultations in smaller groups, some respondents cautioned that any discussions taking place in a smaller working group should be reported back in the informal consultation on the draft text. Member States with smaller delegations highlighted the importance of including experts from capital attending the annual session in the negotiations on the outcome document.

#### *Methods of work*

42. Generally, Member States and NGOs considered the current methods of work of the Commission to be satisfactory for following up, reviewing and assessing the implementation of the Programme of Action. Given the detailed review of working methods that the Commission had undertaken in 2016, Member States felt there was no need to revisit the topic again at this stage.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, several Member States noted that any proposed reforms should be considered in the broader light of aligning the Commission's work with that of ECOSOC. In that regard, the Commission could benefit from a further review of its methods of work once the consultations on the reform of ECOSOC had concluded. Some member states suggested looking into the possibility of integrating these discussions into the ongoing ECOSOC/HLPF review process.

43. Moreover, many countries were of the view that revisiting the Commission's working methods would not help to address the recent failure to adopt resolutions on the special theme, given that differences in viewpoints were substantive in nature. Rather, political will was required to overcome these differences and reach consensus.

44. Some countries expressed the view that consensus could be achieved if divergent positions of Member States on certain key topics were respected.

45. Some NGOs indicated that the main reason for the lack of consensus in the Commission was that some Member States had raised issues that were not included in the ICPD Programme of Action. They suggested that the Commission should concentrate on aspects of the Programme of Action on which there was widespread agreement or on which consensus could be found. These NGOs suggested that the Commission address issues such as education, infrastructure, health care, maternal health, family-sensitive policies as well as other aspects of the Programme of Action that, in their view, had been neglected in the past. They also observed that the outcomes of the regional reviews only applied to the region in which the reviews had been held.

46. By contrast, some NGOs argued that discussing and advancing normative standards on sexual and reproductive health and rights was essential for the implementation of the Programme of Action and should therefore be included in the Commission's deliberations and outcome document. These NGOs indicated that addressing emerging issues was critical for the Commission to remain relevant and recommended that it should pay greater attention to the regional reviews of the Programme of Action, including by seeking regular feedback and inputs from the United Nations regional commissions.

---

<sup>6</sup> See ECOSOC resolution [E/RES/2016/25](#) on the future organization and methods of work of the Commission on Population and Development. The review of the methods of work by the Commission at its forty-ninth session was informed by a note by the Secretariat on the future organization and methods of work of the Commission on Population and Development ([E/CN.9/2016/8](#)).

*Multi-year work programme*

47. Several Member States expressed support for establishing a four-year cycle for the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action as called for in a recent decision on the multi-year work programme.<sup>7</sup> Other Member States considered that the current two-year time horizon for the selection of special themes was preferable as it allowed the Commission to select themes that were topical in the current political environment. Some Member States preferred to defer any changes to the Commission's multi-year work programme until the process to reform of ECOSOC and the review of the modalities of the HLPF was completed.

*Term of members of the Bureau*

48. In line with the practice of some other functional commissions, some Member States expressed support for a possible extension of membership of the Bureau from one to two years, which could facilitate a greater continuity in the work of the Commission. Other countries cautioned, however, that extending the term of Bureau members from one to two years could dissuade candidates from smaller missions. Some Member States suggested organizing a hand-over meeting between the incoming and the outgoing Bureau on a systematic basis.

*Duration of the annual session*

49. Member States expressed support for retaining the current practice of holding the annual session for the duration of one week.

*Role of UNFPA*

50. Generally, Member States agreed with the current division of labour between the Population Division of UN DESA and UNFPA, in which the Population Division provides the substantive Secretariat of the Commission and UNFPA participates as an observer in the Bureau. Nevertheless, it was suggested that UNFPA could play a greater role in supporting the Commission's work, in particular by assisting Member States in the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action at the country level. Member States underlined the importance of coherence and complementarity between the two reports on the special theme, one prepared by UN DESA and one by UNFPA.

---

<sup>7</sup> Commission on Population and Development, Report on the fiftieth session, Chapter I.A (<https://undocs.org/E/2017/25>).

### C. Methods of adoption of draft proposals

51. Without exception, Member States favoured continuing the tradition of adopting the resolutions and decisions of the Commission by consensus. As a last resort, however, some countries felt that in certain situations it may be necessary and appropriate to explore the possibility of voting if consensus could not be reached, either on specific paragraphs or on an entire proposal. Although the rules of procedure of the functional commissions of the ECOSOC allow for voting on a draft proposal that is before the Commission upon the request of a member, and despite the fact that some other bodies had resorted to voting on their main outcomes, many respondents noted that the value of the resolutions and the Commission's future role would be diminished if its resolutions were to be adopted through a vote.

52. Member States indicated that the Commission could consider various strategies that would allow decision-making on draft proposals as a whole by consensus. Member States, including members and non-members of the Commission, could make statements in connection with action on a draft proposal, either before or after, expressing reservations on, or disassociating from, selected paragraphs of a resolution adopted by consensus. This would help to ensure that the outcome reflected the position and priorities of most delegations, while allowing delegations to express their concerns on specific issues, while still joining the consensus on the text as a whole. Also, a member of the Commission could request a vote on one or more selected paragraphs without requesting a vote on the resolution as a whole.

53. It was pointed out that the goal of reaching consensus should not be understood as a way to "veto" decisions, thereby preventing progress on issues of key concern to many Member States.

54. Few Member States favoured a Chair's summary as an outcome of the deliberations on the special theme. Nevertheless, some countries considered that a Chair's summary could usefully capture the diversity of opinions expressed during the annual session in case a consensus outcome could not be achieved.

55. Referring to the significance of the work of the Commission, most Member States affirmed their preference for continuing the current practice of negotiating a resolution on the special theme each year. A few Member States proposed to adopt a resolution on the special theme every other year in order to allow more time to gather evidence, to exchange views, and to reach consensus. However, some respondents cautioned that by negotiating a resolution every other year Member States would have fewer opportunities to hold substantive and evidence-based discussions and to reach compromise and that, consequently, the work of the Commission and the Programme of Action would quickly lose its relevance.

56. Some Member States expressed the view that the recent stalemate in negotiations was the result of efforts by some Member States to introduce terms and concepts which were not part of the Programme of Action. These Member States called for the Commission to focus on its core mandate and for the Bureau to put forward a draft resolution that focused on consensual issues and to avoid language on controversial issues. They contended that the Commission was fit for purpose and that the recent lack of consensus was mainly an expression of the lack of political will. Some of these countries insisted on including a

sovereignty paragraph in the resolution and contended that the regional reviews of the Programme of Action only applied to the regions in which they had been held.

57. Other Member States considered it essential that the Commission take note of progress made since 1994, including on issues not referenced in the Programme of Action, and felt that the Commission should build on the conclusions of conferences or meetings that had reviewed the implementation of the Programme of Action at the regional or global level. These Member States contended that addressing new and emerging issues was critical for maintaining the Commission's relevance and suggested that the Commission could review progress in implementing the commitments made at the Nairobi Summit, held in 2019 on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Cairo conference.

58. Some Member States expressed the view that the approach of the Commission in carrying out the discussions and negotiations should be recalibrated, taking a holistic and comprehensive approach. Rather than focusing on one or two issues that divide the membership, the Commission should concentrate on topics on which Member States can come together. It was proposed to find an innovative way to address specific, contentious issues, so that discussions on these issues would not derail negotiations on the draft resolution.

59. Some NGOs remarked that resolutions had the greatest authority if adopted by consensus. Should consensus prove impossible, they suggested that the Commission could consider taking action by a vote, including voting on selected paragraphs. However, some NGOs argued that resolutions of the Commission should continue to be adopted on the basis of consensus in the spirit of the Programme of Action.

#### **D. Secondary theme**

60. Many Member States indicated they positively considered the suggestion to add a secondary theme to the Commission's programme of work, which could focus on the review of an earlier theme or on an emerging issue. A review theme could resemble the current practice in the Commission on the Status of Women. Several delegates cautioned that an emerging issues theme could lead to the introduction of controversial topics, complicating the negotiations on the draft resolution or to the introduction of issues not germane to the Commission. They noted that the Commission could focus on emerging issues on an ad hoc basis, as was the case during the fifty-third session in 2020, when the discussion of the special theme was broadened to include a consideration of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on food security and nutrition.

61. Member States made numerous proposals for cross-cutting or emerging issues to be addressed by the Commission, including population ageing, climate change, COVID-19, the demographic dividend, population data, poverty eradication, human rights, humanitarian action, international cooperation and inequalities. The consideration of these issues should be carried out in a productive manner, focusing on technical dimensions and shared interests, while putting aside divisive issues.

62. Several Member States highlighted the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on women and girls, who suffered from inequality, discrimination and violence. They cautioned that the pandemic has widened gender inequality, impeding the achievement of the SDGs. Others called for greater attention to the issues of migration, education, health care, adolescents and youth, maternal health, unmet need for family planning, violence against women and harmful practices, and sexual and reproductive health, as well as to actions to eliminate

existing gaps in implementing the Programme of Action at the national, regional and international levels.

63. Many Member States welcomed opportunities to discuss sexual and reproductive health from a rights-based perspective at the Commission. However, one Member State expressed the view that issues of rights related to sexual and reproductive health should be dealt with in other frameworks and by other United Nations entities with relevant mandates. The Secretariat could play an active role in enhancing coordination on this issue within the United Nations system.

### III. Recommendations

64. The Commission may wish to consider the following recommendations.

*The Commission could:*

- Consider adding a secondary theme to the Commission's programme of work, possibly to review an earlier theme or to address an emerging issue;
- Consider reviewing its methods of work once the reform of ECOSOC, including the review of the modalities of the HLPF, has been completed.

*The Bureau could:*

- Consider taking note of this conference room paper, and encouraging further discussions on this issue, with a view to adopting a decision at the next session;
- Systematically involve other United Nations entities and networks with relevant expertise in the preparation of the annual session;
- Hold a dedicated, half-day dialogue between Member States and NGOs in the context of the annual session;
- Systematically convene a hand-over meeting with the incoming Bureau;
- Convene a ministerial panel, including during sessions in which the special theme consists of a comprehensive review of the status of implementation of the Programme of Action;
- Ensure that preparations on the zero draft of the outcome document are conducted in a timely, transparent and inclusive manner, with due consideration to other ongoing intergovernmental processes and that allow sufficient time for delegations to engage constructively.

*Member States could:*

- Systematically integrate an assessment of the status of implementation of the Programme of Action in their voluntary national reviews (VNRs) as well as in the regional and global reviews of the SDGs with the support of UNFPA and the Population Division;
- Systematically share experiences in integrating population dimensions into their VNRs during the HLPF;
- Systematically share experiences in integrating population dimensions into their VNRs at the Commission on Population and Development.

*The Population Division and UNFPA could:*

- **Prepare a comparative analysis (“mapping exercise”) between the Programme of Action and relevant Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;**
  - **Organize technical events in the margins of the HLPF, showcasing the findings of the Commission’s annual session;**
  - **Hold informal technical briefings or expert dialogues on the special theme for Member States and NGOs ahead of the annual session;**
  - **Systematically involve other United Nations entities and NGOs with relevant expertise in technical preparations of the annual session;**
  - **Strengthen national capacities and training opportunities for government experts with a particular focus on demographic data, indicators, methodologies and tools to guide Member States in the implementation of the Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda.**
-