



United Nations

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs

**INFORMAL BRAINSTORMING
MEETING ON THE FUTURE
ROLE AND ORGANIZATION
OF THE COMMISSION ON
POPULATION AND
DEVELOPMENT**

Commission on Population and
Development, fifty-fourth session
New York, 28 January 2021

**INFORMAL SUMMARY
PREPARED BY THE SECRETARIAT**

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 the fifty-fourth session of the Commission. To inform the reflection on this item, the Secretariat prepared a note under the auspices of the Bureau of the fifty-third session. In the note, Member States were invited to respond to three questions.¹
2. In preparation for the consideration of this agenda item, the Bureau of the fifty-fourth session held a virtual informal brainstorming meeting on the future role and organization of the Commission on Population and Development on Thursday 28 January 2021, from 3 to 5 p.m. In his letter of invitation, H.E. Ambassador Yemdaogo Eric Tiare (Burkina Faso), Chair of the fifty-fourth session, had invited Member States to respond to the three questions included in the note prepared by the Secretariat and to share any other relevant observations. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council participated in the meeting as observers.
3. In total, 117 Member States registered for the event as well as 13 Intergovernmental Organizations and 57 NGOs.
4. In his opening remarks, the Chair invited Member States to submit written inputs by Friday, 12 February 2021 at the latest. He reminded participants that it was critical to receive sufficient feedback from all five regional groups. The Chair announced his intention to host a dedicated NGO consultation on this issue in the near future. Written and oral inputs would be used for the preparation of a conference room paper to inform the upcoming session. Following a brief update on the status of preparations for the annual session, he invited Mr. John Wilmoth, Director of the Population Division of UN DESA, to make brief remarks.

¹ All relevant materials are available at www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/future-role-and-organization-commission-population-and-development-country-inputs

5. Mr. Wilmoth recalled that, in April 2016, the Commission had conducted a comprehensive review of its working methods, which had resulted in important guidance on streamlining the agenda, rationalizing documentation, selecting the annual theme, and highlighting national and regional dimensions. The review, informed by a detailed note prepared by the Secretariat, also addressed issues related to outcomes, civil society participation and communication with Member States. It also spelled out the respective roles and responsibilities of the Population Division of UN DESA and UNFPA in supporting the Bureau and the work of the Commission.

6. He suggested that introducing an “emerging issue” or “review” theme, alongside the special theme of the annual session, could make the Commission more relevant, coherent and solution-oriented, as called for in General Assembly resolution 72/305. An additional theme could also help to align the Commission’s work with that of ECOSOC, including for the HLPF under its auspices. The outcome of the discussion on the review theme could be in the form of a Chair’s summary.

7. Nineteen delegates took the floor², many of whom voiced strong support for the Commission.

8. Most delegates considered the current methods of work of the Commission to be satisfactory. Given the detailed review of working methods in 2016, most speakers felt there was no need to revisit them again at this stage. ECOSOC resolution 2016/25 had underscored the primary mandate of the Commission. Moreover, it was unlikely that the recent deadlock in adopting draft resolutions could be overcome by revising the Commission’s working methods, given that the differences in viewpoints were substantive in nature.

9. While most delegates favoured continuing the tradition of adopting resolutions by consensus, some were of the view that, as a last resort, it might be necessary to call for a vote if no consensus could be achieved. Other delegates disagreed, asserting that even though the rules of procedures of the functional commissions allowed for adopting

² The following delegations took the floor: El Salvador, Russian Federation, Canada, United Kingdom, Costa Rica, Norway, Mexico, Romania, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Turkey, Bulgaria, Australia, South Africa, Chad, Lebanon, Netherlands, Gambia, and Holy See.

resolutions by vote, and despite the fact that some other bodies have resorted to this practice, the value of the resolutions would be diminished if adopted through a vote.

10. No delegation expressed support for having a Chair's summary as the outcome of the deliberations on the special theme. Many delegations affirmed their preference for continuing the current practice of negotiating a resolution on the special theme each year.

11. Some delegations expressed the view that the recent stalemate in negotiations was the result of the effort of some Member States to introduce terms and concepts which were not part of the 1994 ICPD Programme of Action. These delegations called for the Commission to focus on its core mandate. The Bureau should put forward a draft resolution that focused on consensual issues and avoided controversial language, such as on abortion or sexual orientation and gender identity. They insisted on the inclusion of a sovereignty paragraph and contended that the regional reviews of the ICPD applied only to the regions in which those reviews were held.

12. Other Member States, however, considered it essential that the Commission take note of progress made since 1994, including on issues that were not referenced in the Programme of Action, and build on the conclusions of the regional review conferences. These delegations contended that addressing new and emerging issues was critical for the Commission to stay relevant. Some delegations suggested that the Commission should review progress in implementing the commitments made at the Nairobi Summit, held in 2019 on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the ICPD Programme of Action. Others pointed out that this meeting took place outside the realm of UN intergovernmental processes.

13. Many delegations were open to the suggestion to add an emerging issues theme or a review theme to the Commission's programme of work. Nevertheless, several delegates cautioned that an emerging issues theme could lead to the introduction of controversial topics that were unlikely to be approved as the special theme of an annual session. Several Member States called for the Commission to address emerging and cross-cutting issues such as climate change, COVID-19, food security, gender equality, human rights, humanitarian action and the demographic dividend. Others called for greater attention to migration, education and maternal health, and to "sexual and reproductive health and rights" or SRHR. It was also suggested that the special theme should be clearly based on demographic trends and the ICPD Programme of Action.

14. There was a broad call for strengthening the technical dimensions of the Commission's work. The reports of the Secretary-General, in particular, should be factual and contain

practical and action-oriented policy recommendations to advance the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action. Some delegations suggested that the current emphasis on negotiations could be reduced by raising the technical content of the discussion, by attracting more experts from capital, and by negotiating the outcome document before the start of the annual session.

15. A few Member States called for greater action to strengthen national systems for population and development data, to focus on high-quality and disaggregated data, and to make visible various population groups, including women, children, older persons, migrants, refugees and indigenous people.

16. A number of delegates called for stronger engagement of NGOs in the work of the Commission, in particular those representing youth and the global South, as well as the need for highlighting regional dimensions. To raise the profile of the Commission, the annual session could include a ministerial panel. In this regard, the Commission could learn from the practices in other commissions, in particular the Commission on the Status of Women.

17. Several delegations noted that any reform of CPD should be considered in the broader light of aligning the Commission's deliberations with the work of ECOSOC. In this regard, they cautioned that adopting a four-year work programme at this stage would be premature.

18. Other issues raised by delegations included the possible extension of membership of the Bureau from one to two years, the need for outcomes from CPD to be taken up in other fora (HLPF, ECOSOC, GA), the possibility of holding intersessional meetings, the need for producing short and action-oriented resolutions, and a greater role for UNFPA in supporting the Commission's work.