



Closing remarks by Mr. John Wilmoth, Director, Population Division / DESA

7 September 2022

Thank you, Jorge.

Our gratitude goes to all the experts who have shared with us their knowledge and insights on the various topics that we have reviewed over the past two days.

Your observations will be extremely helpful to the Population Division and to UNFPA as we draft the reports of the Secretary-General in preparation for the upcoming session of the Commission on Population and Development in April 2023. Both the overall session and two of the Secretary-General's reports will focus on the theme of "Population, education and sustainable development".

As we heard in this meeting over the past two days, recent progress towards universal schooling is far too slow to meet the aspiration of SDG 4. For example, primary school completion rates in sub-Saharan Africa increased by less than one percentage point per year between 2000 and 2020: if that pace of progress continues, completion rates in the region will barely exceed 70% in 2030.

In *World Population Prospects 2022*, the Population Division projected that the size of the population at ages between 6 and 12 years will decrease over the next 25 years in all regions except sub-Sahara Africa, Northern Africa and Western Asia. By contrast, it is projected that about 100 million primary school-age children will be added in sub-Sahara Africa between 2021 and 2050.

We have also heard that education is a major determinant of life chances throughout the world, affecting levels and trends of mortality and fertility, migration patterns and impacts, the experience of growing older, and so forth.

We discussed the intersections of education with key priorities of the Cairo Programme of Action, including gender equality, opportunities for girls, adolescents and youth, and the prevention of early marriage and childbearing.

We also discussed emerging topics on incorporating holistic "21st-century skills" in lifelong learning, ensuring access to digital technologies and skills, and providing inclusive and resilient education systems for all.

The cornerstone of the analyses presented over the past two days has been data. The importance of the timely availability of data on education and population across countries and regions and at all geographical levels is clearly evident. In particular, the availability of data disaggregated by age, sex, educational attainment, and other key characteristics provides the evidence base that is needed for building inclusive societies. Data bring visibility, and the right to be seen is an important first principle of social inclusion.

Education and population processes are similar in that they are long-term processes that unfold relatively slowly over years and decades. Investments in education have payoffs that can extend over a lifetime. Changes in population size and the composition by age and educational attainment take place over decades. Short-term thinking causes these processes to be undervalued in public budgets and decision making. Putting long-term intergenerational thinking at the heart of national governance and the multinational system is important not only for giving proper attention to environmental issues like climate change but also to population-education processes.

Thanks again to all the experts—you have taught us a lot over the past two days. Thanks also to other participants in this meeting, including colleagues from throughout the UN system. Lastly, I would like to recognize and thank sincerely the staff members of the Population Division who have assisted in making this an informative, collegial and productive expert group meeting.

I hope to have an opportunity to meet you again, perhaps next time in person. Have a wonderful day!