



United Nations

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs

EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON POPULATION,
EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT
(Virtual meeting)
New York, 6-7 September 2022

**Opening remarks by Mr. John Wilmoth, Director, Population Division / DESA
6 September 2022, 12 p.m., EDT**

Good morning, good afternoon and good evening. I am John Wilmoth, Director of the Population Division in the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

Let me begin by extending a warm welcome to all of you. Thank you for participating in this expert group meeting on population, education and sustainable development. The meeting is being organized to gather the latest evidence and insights on this topic, as part of the preparations for the 56th session of the Commission on Population and Development in April 2023.

For those not familiar with the Commission, it is the intergovernmental body of the United Nations that is charged with the follow-up and review of the Cairo Programme of Action, which was adopted by UN Member States in 1994 at the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, Egypt. Within its mandate to follow up on the Cairo agreement, the Commission also contributes to the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015.

Each year, the Commission selects a special theme for the annual session guided by the topics considered in the Programme of Action. The current theme, “Population, education and sustainable development”, is closely related to chapter eleven of the Cairo document.

The primary purpose of this meeting is to inform the reports of the Secretary-General that will be prepared over the next few months to serve as inputs to the Commission’s deliberations on this year’s theme.

More broadly, the goal of this year’s CPD session, and of our work today and tomorrow, is to support progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 4, which calls for ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.

As you know, the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted education systems worldwide. According to the 2022 report on progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, an estimated 147 million children missed more than half of their in-person instruction over the past two years. In response to a global crisis in education, the Transforming Education Summit is being convened starting next Friday in the UN General Assembly. The Summit is intended to elevate education to the top of the global political agenda, to support recovery from pandemic-related learning losses and to sow the seeds to transform education in a rapidly changing world.

In adopting the Programme of Action in Cairo in 1994, Governments recognized that education is a key element of sustainable development that influences individual well-being through its impact on social, economic and demographic processes. Lower levels of fertility and mortality, the empowerment of women and increases in worker productivity have all been assisted, if not driven, by expanded access to basic and higher levels of education.

The Cairo agreement calls for providing universal access to primary education and closing the gender gap in education at the primary and secondary levels. It requests Governments to expand policies and programmes to support youth and adult education and lifelong learning.

The Programme of Action also calls for providing formal and informal education about population and health issues, including sexual and reproductive health, to promote the well-being of adolescents.

In today's world, ensuring access to and facilitating the use of modern communication technologies is a vital means of addressing barriers to education, especially in developing countries. Last year in the UN General Assembly, the Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Amina Mohammed, warned that without decisive action by the international community, the digital divide will become "the new face of inequality".

In short, this meeting could not be more timely.

Over the next two days, we will review the latest evidence and policy recommendations related to population, education and sustainable development. We will seek to identify concrete conclusions and concise recommendations for action that can inform the reports of the Secretary-General that I mentioned earlier.

I wish to thank all of the experts and other participants for joining us today and tomorrow and for sharing your knowledge and insights on these important topics. This online meeting is also being attended by representatives of Member States, civil society and the UN system.

I would like to recognize the Chair of the 56th session of the Commission on Population and Development, his Excellency Mr. Gheorghe Leucă, Permanent Representative of Moldova to the United Nations in New York. Welcome Ambassador!

I see also that two other Bureau members are in attendance: Mr. Edgar Sisa of Botswana and Ms. Sarah Linton of Australia. Welcome and thank you for participating in this expert meeting.

I encourage everyone to participate in the question-and-answer segment of each session, including the interactive closing session tomorrow afternoon. I look forward to an interesting and productive meeting.

And now, without further ado, I will pass the floor to Rachel Snow of UNFPA and then to Christopher Castle of UNESCO, who will each share with us their opening remarks.