



Thirty years after Cairo:

Major trends, progress made and challenges ahead



Department of Economic and Social Affairs
Population Division

Thirty years after Cairo

Major trends, progress made and challenges ahead



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United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division

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Preface

This report, *Thirty years after Cairo: Major trends, progress made and challenges ahead*, gives a broad overview of global demographic trends since the International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo in 1994, and those foreseeable over the next 30 years. These include the continued yet slowing growth of the global population, its progressive ageing, and the increasing urbanization and scale of international migration. The report highlights the similarities and gradual convergence of demographic trends across major groups of countries, as well as the diversity of demographic situations among certain countries and regions.

The analysis explores key linkages between the Cairo Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals. The report highlights prominent regional population trends, taking into account the regional reviews of implementation of the Programme of Action that were held during the second half of 2023 and it will summarize best practices and policy priorities on population and development for the next three decades.

The main content of the report is drawn from the report of the Secretary-General on assessing the status of implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and its contribution to the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development during the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development (E/CN.9/2024/2), presented to the Commission on Population and Development at its fifty-seventh session, held from 29 April – 3 May 2024, under agenda item 3(b) on the same topic. Annexes to the report include the political declaration adopted by the Commission at its fifth-seventh session, an informal summary of panel discussions and general debate held under agenda item 3(b), and an informal summary of the informal plenary meeting of the General Assembly to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action, held on 29 April 2024.

The report is part of a series on major demographic trends being prepared by the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Other reports in the series have investigated the linkages between population growth, social and economic development and environmental change and analyzed population ageing. The main purpose of the series is to provide informed analysis of population patterns and trends in the context of sustainable development in a manner that is accessible to a general audience and that can help to guide the policymaking of Member States and the deliberations of the United Nations Commission on Population and Development.

Contents

Executive summary	1
I. Population megatrends since 1994 and prospects until 2054	2
Global convergence in demographic trends since 1994	2
II. Regional perspectives on population and development	6
Economic Commission for Africa	6
Economic Commission for Europe	6
Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean	7
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific	7
Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia	8
III. Global population growth and sustainable development.....	11
Causes and consequences of rapid population growth.....	11
Impacts of population growth on the environment, including climate change.....	11
IV. Population and development in an ageing world	14
Increasing care needs and the care economy	15
V. Urbanization and international mobility in an increasingly interconnected world.....	17
Urbanization and spatial distribution of the population	17
International migration and sustainable development.....	18
VI. Other cross-cutting issues	20
Population trends and the eradication of poverty	20
Demographic change and gender equality	21
Population processes and human rights	21
VII. Recommendations	24
Annex I.....	26
Annex II.....	28
Annex III.....	30

Explanatory notes

The designations employed in this publication and the material presented in it do not imply the expression of any opinions whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. The term “country” as used in this report also refers, as appropriate, to territories or areas.

The classification of countries and areas by income level is based on gross national income (GNI) per capita as reported by the World Bank (2022). These income groups are not available for all countries and areas. Further information is available at: <https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519-world-bank-country-and-lending-groups>.



Cairo, Egypt: International Conference on Population and Development. "HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT SPEAKERS" 09/05/1994. UN Photo.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the three decades since the International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo in 1994, the world's population has grown by nearly 2.5 billion; it is expected to increase by another 1.7 billion over the next 30 years.

Rapid population growth continues to be a challenge for a subset of developing countries with persistent high levels of fertility. Such countries often lack sufficient resources to invest in health, education and decent employment and to move towards sustainable economic systems powered by clean energy. Like other countries, they are undergoing a demographic transition towards longer lives and smaller families but are at a relatively early stage. As the fertility level continues to fall, those countries can benefit from an opportunity for accelerated economic growth and development known as the demographic dividend.

For most other countries, population growth has slowed down, and an increasing number are now experiencing population decline and advanced levels of population ageing. The rapid growth of the older population highlights the need to invest in lifelong learning, to create age-friendly work environments, to expand flexible employment options, including part-time work, for older persons and to develop sustainable long-term care and social protection systems to address the needs of the population throughout the life course.

Over the next 30 years, an increasingly interdependent world will require expanded international cooperation to mitigate anthropogenic climate change and environmental degradation; to facilitate safe, orderly and regular migration; and to advance the planning and implementation of national policies, including for the promotion of sustainable urbanization, as cities will be the home of around two thirds of the world's population by 2050.

I. Population megatrends since Cairo and prospects to 2054

Since the International Conference on Population and Development was convened in 1994, the world has experienced major transformations. The global population, which stood at 5.6 billion in 1994, has grown to 8.1 billion in 2024 and is projected to increase further, to nearly 9.9 billion in 2054. Much of that growth will be driven by the momentum generated by past growth, which shifts the population towards younger ages and ensures the continued growth of the population of reproductive age over the next few decades, even after the number of births per women falls to much lower levels.

Population growth rates vary greatly by region. Sub-Saharan Africa is expected to contribute over half of the global population increase until 2050 owing to sustained high levels of fertility. In other regions, the rate of population growth is mostly positive but declining. East and South-East Asia, Europe and North America will begin to experience population decline by 2050, with Latin America and the Caribbean following shortly thereafter. By 2050, most of the increase in global population will be contributed by three regions: sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa and Western Asia, and Central and South Asia.

Fertility has continued to decline since 1994. High-fertility countries have become concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa, while regions like East and South-East Asia have witnessed significant reductions owing to socioeconomic development and improved access to family planning.

Remarkable improvements have been seen in life expectancy at birth for both sexes, which has risen globally from 64.5 years in 1994 to 73.7 years in 2024, driven by reductions in mortality rates across all age groups. Improvements in survivorship, coupled with falling fertility, have transformed the age distribution of the global population. Globally, the number of children under the age of 5 has remained stable, while the number of persons age 65 or over has more than doubled in the past 30 years and is expected to double again by 2054.

The world's population is also increasingly urban, with nearly 58 per cent of the global population residing in urban areas in 2024. The rural population, living mostly in developing countries, is expected to continue to decline over the coming decades.

International migration has also intensified. An estimated 281 million people were living outside their country of birth in 2020, a substantial increase from 161 million in 1995. Europe hosts the largest number of international migrants, followed by North America and by North Africa and Western Asia.

Global convergence in demographic trends since 1994

Since the conference in Cairo in 1994, there have been widespread reductions in mortality and fertility rates across countries and regions, yet large disparities remain. The global decline in fertility (figure I) has been driven by significant reductions in lower-middle-income countries and low-income countries, which have moved closer to levels observed in high-income countries.

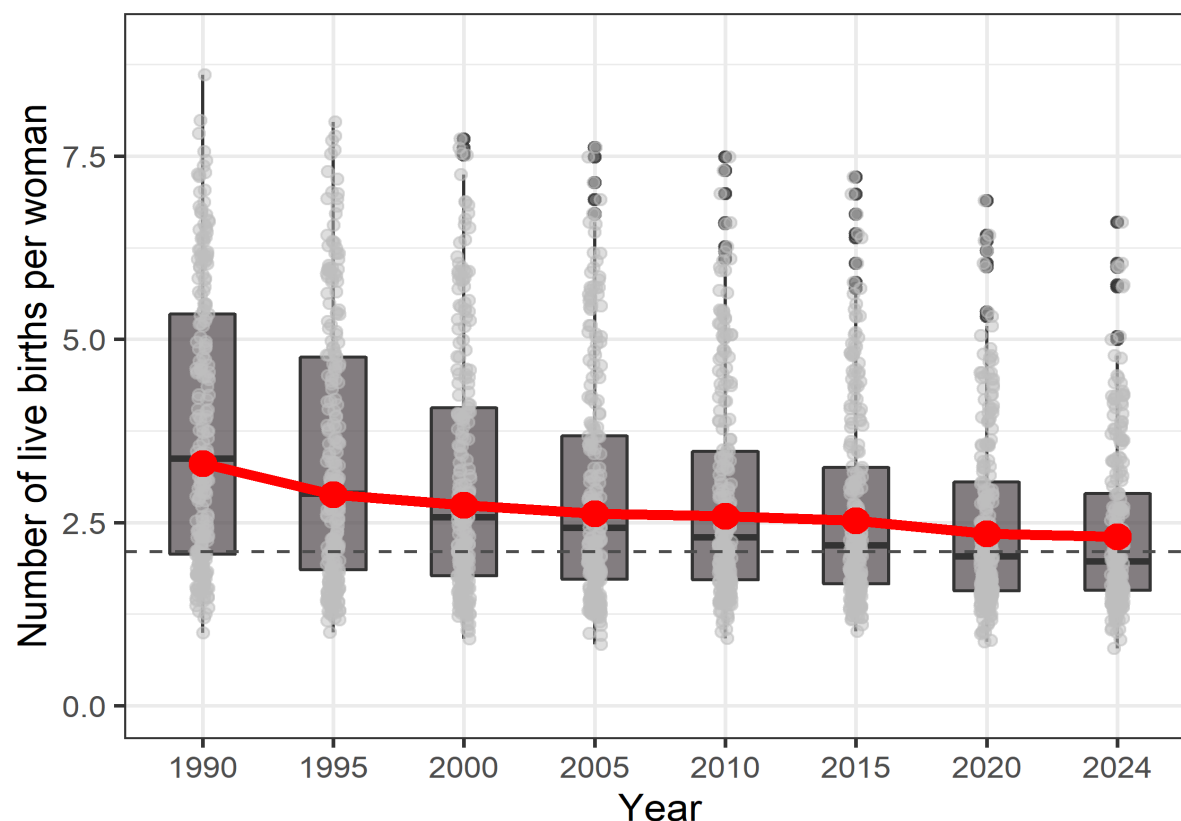
Adolescent fertility rates have also decreased globally, narrowing the gap between low- and high-income countries. Considerable differences persist, however, within income groups, which indicates a need for targeted interventions.

Life expectancy has risen globally, with a narrowing gap between low- and high-income countries (figure II). Despite improvements, over 60 countries still fall below the International Conference on Population and Development target of a life expectancy at birth of 70 years. Mortality rates, including under-5 mortality and maternal mortality, have declined across all income groups. Nevertheless, achieving the Sustainable Development Goal target for child mortality remains a challenge for many low- and lower-middle-income countries.

There has not been a comparable convergence in population growth rates across country income groups. While there has been some convergence between high- and upper-middle-income countries, the gap between high- and low-income countries persists. Projections suggest that the gap may only narrow slightly in the next 30 years.

Figure I

Average, median and dispersion of the worldwide total fertility rate, 1990–2024



Source: *World Population Prospects: The 2022 Revision* (United Nations publication, 2022).

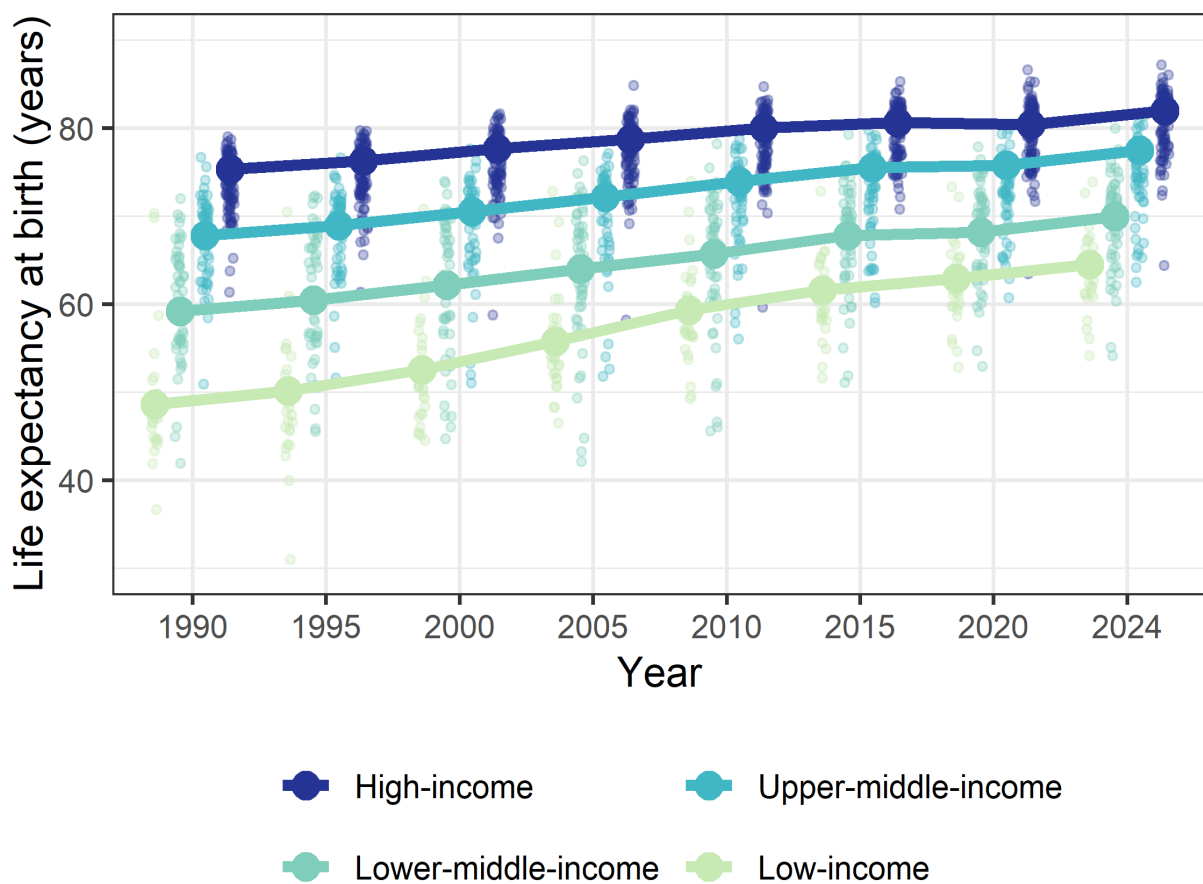
Note: Dispersion is represented by the rectangular box bounded by the twenty-fifth and the seventy-fifth percentiles of the entire range of values (dots) for each year. The black line represents the average.

There has not been a comparable convergence in population growth rates across country income groups. While there has been some convergence between high- and upper-middle-income countries, the gap between high- and low-income countries persists. Projections suggest that the gap may only narrow slightly in the next 30 years.

The demographic transition towards longer lives and smaller families has led to a rapid upward shift in the age distribution of the population, especially in high- and upper-middle-income countries, while low-income countries continue to maintain young age structures. A net inflow of international migrants to high-income countries has helped to sustain positive rates of population growth, countering a near-zero or negative balance of births over deaths.

Figure II

Life expectancy at birth by country income group, 1990–2024



Source: *World Population Prospects: The 2022 Revision* (United Nations publication, 2022).



Cairo, Egypt. The International Conference on Population and Developments meets in Cairo to produce a Programme of Action that will become a blueprint for global population policy for the next twenty years. 09/08/1994. UN Photos.

II. Regional perspectives on population and development

Economic Commission for Africa

At the regional review of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development held in 2023, emphasis was placed on the significance of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Agenda 2063 of the African Union. It was acknowledged that, despite political commitment and increased stakeholder involvement, the implementation of population policies in Africa had been limited due to economic shocks and setbacks, which had constrained the fiscal space.

Despite the significant progress made by African nations in reducing extreme poverty in recent decades, some of those gains were reversed by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, pushing millions into poverty. At present, the continent accounts for 80 per cent of the world's poor.

With a population of 1.4 billion, Africa is the world's second-most populous region. It is projected to contribute over half of the global population increase between now and 2050.

In the light of the anticipated ageing of the currently youthful population (a median age of below 20 years), investments in human capital are required to build a productive workforce. Sustained reductions in the fertility rate present the potential for a demographic dividend, if the population has access to quality health care, education and decent work.

Africa continues to experience gains in life expectancy, and both the number and the share of persons age 65 years or older are projected to increase in the future. While increased longevity is a positive outcome of human development, it also brings challenges related to the rising costs of health care and old-age pensions. Africa has the lowest coverage of social protection systems globally, with only 17 per cent of the population receiving at least one social protection benefit.

The continent is also undergoing significant changes in spatial population distribution due to migration and urbanization, with the proportion of the urban population expected to reach 59 per cent by 2050.

Economic Commission for Europe

At the 2023 regional review of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, three thematic priorities were highlighted: (a) population dynamics and sustainable development; (b) families and sexual and reproductive health over the life course; and (c) inequalities, social inclusion and rights. With a population of 1.3 billion in 2023, the region had grown by 160 million since 1994 and is expected to grow by an additional 40 million by 2050.

While population dynamics vary across countries, the region is characterized by low levels of fertility and by ageing populations. With a regional average of 1.7 births per woman, the total fertility rate lies below replacement level for most countries.

People age 65 years or older account for 17.6 per cent of the region's population. One in three countries in the region have experienced population decline since 1994, and half are projected to do so by 2030.

Immigration partially offsets the impacts of low fertility in Western Europe and North America, propping up the population growth rate and attenuating the process of population ageing. However, a net outflow of international migrants exacerbates population ageing and contributes to population decline in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe.

While substantial progress has been made in the region towards most objectives of the International Conference on Population and Development, gains have been uneven within and across countries, and favourable trends have been disrupted by recent crises. Overall, people in the region are living longer, healthier lives, yet progress towards universal health coverage has slowed recently. Disparities by subregion, gender and age persist in

deaths caused by non-communicable disease and suicide. Premature mortality rates from noncommunicable diseases are below 175 per 100,000 population in several Northern European countries but exceed 550 per 100,000 population in parts of Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Suicide mortality rates among people age 65 or older are twice as high as for the rest of the population. Access to quality education, lifelong learning and decent work is improving, but persons with disabilities, young people and older persons still lag behind. Progress towards reducing poverty and social exclusion has also slowed.

Barriers in gaining access to sexual and reproductive information, education and healthcare services, including family planning, persist in some countries and for certain population subgroups. HIV infections in Eastern Europe and Central Asia have increased since 2010 by 49 per cent.

Gender gaps in employment and in paid and unpaid care work have narrowed, but disparities remain in all countries. In half of countries from all subregions for which data are available, the share of individuals who believe it is justifiable for a man to beat his wife has increased in recent years.¹ Women, migrants, persons with disabilities, older persons and members of ethnic minority groups continue to experience multiple and intersecting disadvantages in economic and social life.

At the regional review, emphasis was placed on the need for a holistic, life-course- and rights-based approach to population dynamics and sustainable development. Calls were made for continued efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment and for comprehensive policies to ensure that all individuals can fulfil their potential regardless of race, disability, age or gender.

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

The countries of Latin America and the Caribbean have recognized the contribution of the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development to the global follow-up of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and to implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Many countries in the region, however, have faced a prolonged social crisis marked by economic deterioration, a stagnation of education and high poverty rates, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In Latin America and the Caribbean, poverty is higher among children, adolescents and adult women ages 20 to 59, as well as among Indigenous populations and those of African descent.

The region is experiencing rapid population ageing. By the end of the century, it is projected that about 38 per cent of the population will be age 65 or older. Total fertility in Latin America and the Caribbean has stayed below the replacement level since 2015, but adolescent fertility remains the second highest globally.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought to the fore the need to close the digital divide and to ensure universal access to education and healthcare services, including mental healthcare services. As in other regions of the world, the pandemic disproportionately affected older persons in Latin America and the Caribbean, and the associated increase in care responsibilities, especially for women, exacerbated the challenges of achieving a work-life balance.

At the regional review, emphasis was placed on the importance of quality, disaggregated data for implementation of the Montevideo Consensus and for public policymaking.

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

At the regional review, multifaceted challenges and transitions in population and development across the region were underlined. In a region with around 4.7 billion people, or 60 per cent of the global population, previously high fertility and mortality rates are decreasing, and populations have become older and more urban.

Despite significant socioeconomic progress, there are continuing and emerging challenges, including shrinking workforces, population ageing, environmental degradation, increased immigration, persistent inequalities, human rights violations and ageism. Those challenges have been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and digital transformations.

Poverty is prevalent in many countries of the region, especially in rural areas. The pandemic amplified challenges in employment and poverty, which has affected women, migrants, older persons and persons with disabilities in particular.

¹ World Values Survey (2005–2022). Available at <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSOnline.jsp> (accessed on 18 August 2023).

The region has seen improvements in health and mortality, yet achieving universal health coverage remains a distant goal. Total fertility rates have declined sharply in the region, from 6 births per woman in the 1960s to 1.9 in 2020, leading to concerns about the impacts of very low fertility.

Gender disparities persist regarding labour force participation (43.6 per cent for women versus 73.4 per cent for men), income, savings and pension coverage. Gender-based violence remains pervasive. Educational attainment rates have increased, but gender disparities persist, while technical and vocational education remains underdeveloped.²

The region's rapidly growing older population, which is expected to double by 2050, poses challenges related to health, poverty and isolation, especially for women and persons with disabilities. Nevertheless, population ageing also presents opportunities for intergenerational living and solidarity.

Migratory flows predominantly consist of the movement of labour migrants within the region. In addition, many people from South and South-West Asia move to Western Asia, in particular to the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Climate change, natural disasters and forced migration, which disproportionately affect populations in vulnerable situations, are major concerns in the region. The region contributes significantly to climate change and has started to implement mitigation efforts, resilience-building measures and climate adaptation strategies.

Urbanization is proceeding rapidly, and it is projected that the region will be home to five of the world's six most populous cities in 2035, namely, Delhi, Tokyo, Shanghai, Dhaka and Mumbai. Urban challenges include slums, inadequate housing and a lack of basic services and of affordable, accessible and sustainable transportation.

An analysis by the Statistics Division of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific shows that the availability of sufficient data for population-related Sustainable Development Goal indicators varies across the region. Data gaps persist for certain indicators, notably Goals 5, 14 and 16.

Notable progress has been made in censuses and vital statistics systems, supported by strategic planning and surveys. Technological advances, such as geolocation and big data, offer promising avenues for meaningful and ethical data collection.

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

The region of Western Asia is undergoing profound demographic changes, prompting governments to reassess policies with a view to harnessing the demographic dividend and addressing the challenges posed by rapid population ageing and increased urbanization.

The total population of the region surged from 123 million in 1970 to 250 million in 1994 and 436 million in 2020; it is projected to be 671 million in 2050. The growth rate is expected to decline to 1.5 per cent per year but will remain above the global average, boosting the region's share of the world's population to nearly 7 per cent by 2050.

Western Asia continues to be a predominantly youthful region, with 60 per cent of the population under age 30. There is concern about the substantial number of young people not in employment, education or training, which, at an estimated 21 million young people in 2020, or about a third of the region's total, significantly exceeded the global average.

After quadrupling from 4.5 million in 1970 to 20.7 million in 2020, the number of older persons (age 65 or older) is projected to reach 71.4 million, or 11 per cent of the total population, by 2050.

Human mobility is a prominent feature of the region's demographics. Western Asia hosts about 15 per cent of the global migrant population, including 9.3 million refugees. In 2020, there were 41.4 million international migrants in the region, many of whom were working in the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Nearly 33 million people migrated or were forcibly displaced from Arab countries, and 44 per cent of them settled within the region. Urbanization is progressing rapidly, with 75 per cent of the population expected to live in urban areas by 2050.

² See Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *Asia-Pacific Population and Development Report 2023* (Bangkok, 2023).

Policy priorities for the region include incorporating demographic trends into development planning, enhancing employment opportunities, developing age-sensitive policies, safeguarding the well-being of migrants and refugees, fostering inclusive urban development and improving data collection for evidence-based policymaking. Lack of policy coherence, fiscal constraints, internal conflicts and foreign occupation present challenges to effective policy implementation.

III. Global population growth and sustainable development

Causes and consequences of rapid population growth

As recognized in the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, the continuing high levels of fertility that drive rapid population growth in many low- and lower-middle-income countries are both a cause and a symptom of slow progress in development. Rapid population growth increases the scale of the investments needed to raise per capita public expenditure to the level required to eradicate poverty, end hunger and malnutrition, and ensure universal access to health care, education and other essential services.

Childbearing and marriage before the age of 18 continue to be common in some parts of the world. In the Programme of Action, emphasis is placed on the importance of reducing the number of child and early marriages. The Programme of Action also contains the recommendations that the incidence of pregnancy among adolescents should be substantially reduced and adolescent sexual and reproductive health issues should be addressed, including unsafe abortion and sexually transmitted infections.

Globally, sub-Saharan Africa has been the region with the highest birth rate among adolescents ages 15 to 19 since the 1960s. The adolescent fertility rate in the region has been falling since the late 1970s, but the decline has been slow. Latin America and the Caribbean and Central and South Asia are two regions that have experienced steep declines in adolescent fertility rates in recent decades; while the former continues to be the region with the second highest adolescent birth rate globally, the rate is now relatively low in the latter.

Given the large number of women and girls who are, or will soon be, of childbearing age, it is unlikely that the slowdown in global population growth over the next 30 years will be substantially faster than anticipated in United Nations projections. Nevertheless, even though reductions in fertility over the next few years can have only a limited effect on global population growth between now and 2054, a decline in fertility in the near term can have important consequences for growth in the second half of the century, as the impact of high fertility on population size cumulates from one generation to the next.

Population and development trends affect and often reinforce each other. For example, progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, especially targets related to reproductive health, education and gender equality, contribute significantly to the transition towards longer lives and smaller families and to breaking intergenerational cycles of poverty. Increased access to reproductive healthcare services, including safe and effective methods of family planning, facilitates declines in fertility rates and slows population growth, which in turn contributes to economic and social development.

Impacts of population growth on the environment, including climate change

A growing global population places increasing pressure on the Earth's natural resources, in particular common property resources like air and water, whose use is not regulated effectively by market forces. However, population increase is not the only underlying factor; rising living standards and changing production and consumption patterns are often a much more significant driver of environmental damage than population increase. Available evidence indicates that the countries that have been contributing the most to unsustainable production and consumption patterns are generally those with high per capita incomes and slow population growth, if the population is growing at all, not those with low per capita incomes and rapid population growth.

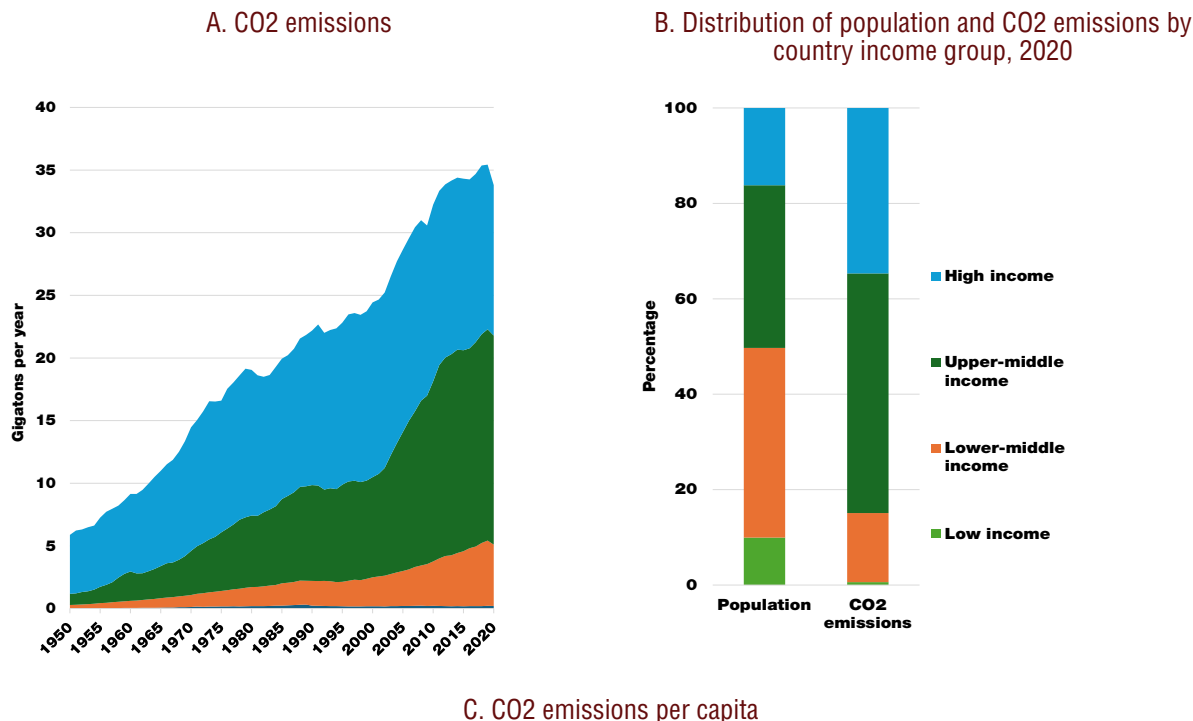
The existing high levels of consumption and production in high-income countries are not sustainable or replicable at a global scale. Some estimates suggest that humanity's collective material footprint – its current utilization of nature's goods and services – already exceeds the planet's ability to sustainably meet demand by 70 per cent.³ Although great uncertainty remains regarding future consumption and production patterns, the International Resource Panel indicates that about 70 per cent of the anticipated global increase in the use of natural resources through 2050 will be attributable to an increase in consumption per capita, while about 30 per cent will be attributable to population growth.⁴

³ Partha Dasgupta, "The economics of biodiversity: afterword" in *Environmental and Resource Economics*, vol. 83, No. 4 (December 2022), p. 1017; Mathis Wackernagel and Bert Beyers, *Ecological Footprint: Managing Our Biocapacity Budget* (Gabriola Island, Canada, New Society Publishers, 2019).

⁴ United Nations Environment Programme, *Resource Efficiency: Potential and Economic Implications. A report of the International Resource Panel* (Nairobi, 2019).

Figure III

Annual total and per capita CO₂ emissions, 1950–2021, and distribution of global population and CO₂ emissions, 2020, by income group



Sources: Global Carbon Project, excerpted in Hannah Ritchie, Pablo Rosado and Max Roser, "CO₂ and Greenhouse Gas Emissions", Our World in Data; World Urbanization Prospects: The 2018 Revision (United Nations publication, 2019).

A central challenge of sustainable development is finding a way to achieve sustained economic growth without contributing further to global warming or other adverse environmental impacts of economic activity. Strategies to reduce resource use and environmental impact per unit of economic activity include lessening the reliance on fossil fuels and other non-renewable, high-intensity resources; increasing the efficiency of resource use; extending product life cycles through intelligent product design and standardization to encourage reuse, recycling and remanufacturing; and promoting a shift in consumption patterns towards goods and services with lower energy and material intensity.⁵

Even though the growth of human consumption may contribute more to ongoing environmental damage than the growth of the human population, the impact of population size should not be ignored. In the global review conducted in 1999 for the five year anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development, it was affirmed that an early stabilization of the world's population would make a crucial contribution to realizing the overarching objective of sustainable development (General Assembly resolution [S-21/2](#), annex).

Commitment by high- and upper-middle-income countries to reducing their collective material footprint is critical. Even though their populations are not expected to grow rapidly, those countries will likely account for most of the additional pressures that humans will exert on the global environment over the next few decades.⁶

As of 2021, high- and upper-middle-income countries, which together comprise 48 per cent of the world's population, were responsible for about 82 per cent of carbon dioxide (CO₂) added to the atmosphere each year. Low- and lower-middle-income countries, where most future population growth is projected to occur, have contributed significantly less to such emissions to date, both in total and on a per capita basis (figure III).

⁵ The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2019 (United Nations publication, 2019); The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2021 (United Nations publication, 2021).

⁶ Thomas O. Wiedmann and others, "The material footprint of nations", *PNAS*, vol. 112, No. 20 (2013).



Qatar. Nepali domestic workers enjoying their day off in the park. ILO Photo/Hemanth Madupu.

IV. Population and development in an ageing world

Population ageing is a defining global trend of the present day. Individuals are living longer almost everywhere, and there are now more older people in the world than ever before. Even before the conference in Cairo in 1994, the number and share of older persons in the world had been growing; since 1994, the number and share of children and young people have begun to shrink. The number of persons age 65 or older is expected to double by 2050, surpassing 1.6 billion, and is expected to continue to grow after that.

Population ageing, measured by the increase in the proportion of the population age 65 or older, is most advanced in Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand, and much of East and South-East Asia. Most parts of sub-Saharan Africa and Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand) are still at an early stage of the transition, while most countries in Central and South Asia, Western Asia and North Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean are at an intermediate stage.

In the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, ageing and its economic and social impacts are presented as both a challenge and an opportunity for all societies. Recognition is given to the importance of addressing the needs of individuals throughout their lives, including in old age. Specifically, Governments are called upon to enable older persons to lead self-determined, healthy and productive lives and to recognize the contributions they make to their families and society.

The most important global agreement on population ageing since the International Conference on Population and Development is the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, adopted in 2002 and reaffirmed in 2022 at the fourth review and appraisal of the Madrid Plan of Action. In December 2020, the General Assembly proclaimed 2021–2030 as the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing, a global collaboration aligned with the last 10 years of the Sustainable Development Goals that is aimed at improving the lives of older persons, their families and the communities where they live.

When armed with medium to long-term forecasts, Governments can develop fiscal plans consistent with projected demographic changes, considering their impact on public revenues and expenditures including by assessing potential budgetary implications for health care, pensions and social security systems.

Globally, 77.5 per cent of persons above retirement age receive some form of old-age pension. However, major disparities exist across countries and regions, between rural and urban areas, and between women and men. Where such pensions do not exist, countries need to find ways of developing effective old-age support systems.⁷

Reforms to ensure that pension systems can provide adequate benefits fairly and sustainably in an ageing population include increasing statutory retirement ages, adjusting benefit formulas, instituting universal pensions and encouraging private retirement savings. Such reforms should be aimed at ensuring adequate support for present and future generations and reducing the risks of poverty and inequality at older ages.

An increase in labour force participation rates for women is another means of boosting total and per capita economic output. Currently, unpaid care work, performed mostly by women, is not counted as part of total economic production. The estimated 16.4 billion hours spent on unpaid care work annually represents some 2 billion jobs unaccounted for in official statistics.

In ageing societies, labour productivity tends to fall in the absence of incentives and opportunities for older workers to enhance their skills and knowledge. The adoption of a life-course approach to population ageing recognizes that investments in health, education and training have positive consequences later in life and help to maintain productivity at older ages.

Such investments, coupled with changes in working conditions for older persons, such as providing options for part-time employment, making workplaces more age-friendly and supporting an integrated intergenerational workforce, help to extend the economic contributions of older persons. Population ageing has become a key driver of changes in work, technology and markets, as seen in countries at advanced stages of population ageing.

⁷ International Labour Organization, World Social Protection Report 2020–2022 (Geneva, 2021).

An increasing priority is to design and implement policies aimed at containing the growth of healthcare costs, especially for ageing populations. Such policies include promoting preventive healthcare, encouraging healthy lifestyles, optimizing healthcare delivery systems, promoting cost-effective treatments, building community-based healthcare systems and harnessing the benefits of innovations such as telemedicine.

Policies that facilitate gender equality and a better work-family balance, beyond their intrinsic value, may encourage higher levels of childbearing and help to moderate the speed of population ageing over time. Other measures, such as promoting immigration, can help to reinforce the working-age population with more immediate effect but may also generate public resistance.

Increasing care needs and the care economy

The demand for long-term care is increasing in most countries, given the rapid growth in numbers of older persons, especially those age 80 or older. Traditionally, the care needs of older persons have been met informally within extended families living together. However, intergenerational living arrangements have declined drastically in recent decades, especially in developed countries, which has contributed to an increasing demand for long-term care.⁸

Because women live longer and spend a longer period of their lives in poor health, older women are more likely than older men to need long-term care services. Moreover, greater female longevity means that a larger proportion of older women are widows and lack potential support from a spouse.

Care models that rely primarily on families are increasingly inadequate. Public spending in most countries to date, however, has been insufficient to cover the growing demand for long-term care. The average expenditure by the countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development was 1.5 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2019, down from 1.7 per cent in 2017.

Most caregivers are undervalued, underpaid and inadequately trained, often working in difficult conditions, which results in poor quality of care. New legislation, consistent with international labour standards, is needed to recognize and protect care workers and to address inequalities in working conditions, particularly among women, migrants and members of ethnic minorities, who are overrepresented in the care sector.

⁸ *World Population Ageing 2020 Highlights: Living arrangements of older persons* (United Nations publication, 2020).

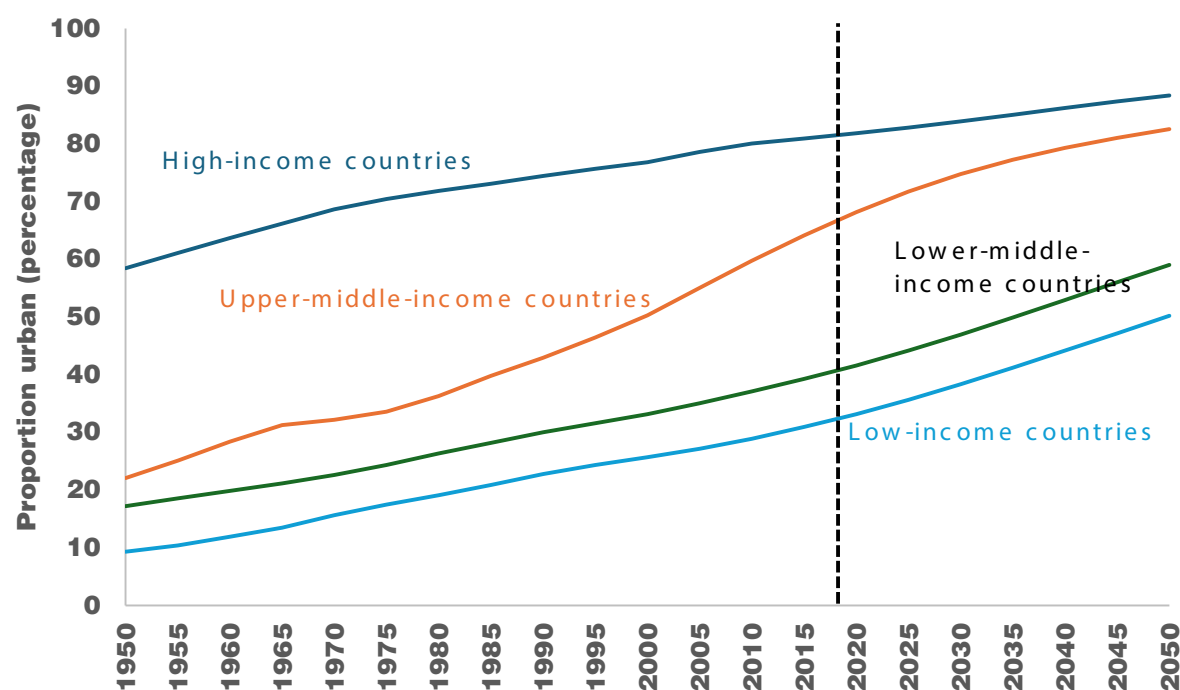
V. Urbanization and international mobility in an increasingly interconnected world

Urbanization and spatial distribution of the population

In 1994, just over 44 per cent of the world's population lived in urban areas. According to United Nations estimates and projections, the global population became more urban than rural in 2007. As of 2024, the proportion of the population living in urban areas is approximately 58 per cent globally. Projections suggest that the proportion will reach 60 per cent around 2030 and may exceed 68 per cent by 2050.⁹

The Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development correctly anticipated that the most rapid rates of urbanization would be observed in developing countries ([A/CONF.171/13/Rev.1](#), para. 1.10). Before 1994, more than 60 per cent of the global urban population already resided in less-developed regions. Current projections indicate that more than 90 per cent of the increase in the global urban population between now and 2050 will occur in developing countries, mostly in Asia and Africa (see figure IV).

Figure IV
Percentage of the global population living in urban areas by country income group, 1950–2050



Source: *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2018 Revision*.

Note: Country income classification is based on figures for per capita gross national income in 2016 from the World Bank.

Although large cities, especially megacities of 10 million inhabitants or more, are highly visible forms of urbanization in both developed and developing countries, nearly half of the global urban population lives in urban areas with fewer than 500,000 people. Another third lives in cities with between 500,000 and 5,000,000 inhabitants. Small cities and towns with fewer than 250,000 inhabitants are increasingly critical to achieving sustainable urban futures in low-income countries.¹⁰

⁹ *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2018 Revision* (United Nations publication, 2018).

¹⁰ United Nations Human Settlements Programme, *World Cities Report 2022: Envisaging the Future of Cities* (Nairobi, 2022).

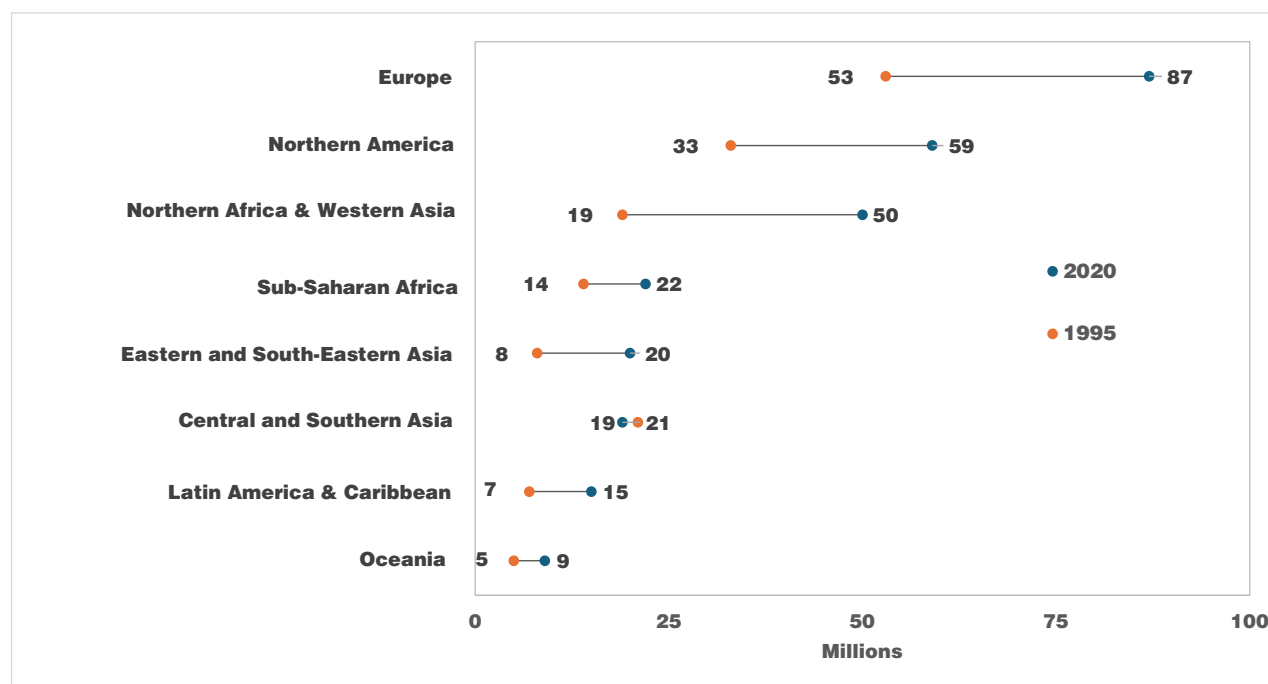
Urbanization is closely related to the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development and has generally been a positive force for economic growth, poverty reduction and human development. Cities are places where entrepreneurship and technological innovation can thrive. Economies of scale in urban areas facilitate the sustainable provision of infrastructure, such as roads, piped water and electricity, as well as basic services.

International migration and sustainable development

The number of international migrants has grown considerably since the adoption of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, from 161 million in 1995 to 281 million in 2020.¹¹ Most of this increase was due to labour or family migration, but humanitarian crises have also contributed, with the number of refugees and asylum-seekers climbing from 18 million in 1995 to nearly 34 million in 2020. Since 2020, the number of persons forcibly displaced across national borders has continued to climb, with some 35.3 million refugees, 5.4 million asylum-seekers and 5.2 million other people in need of international protection at the end of 2022.¹²

In 2020, Europe was the region with the largest number of international migrants (87 million). North America hosted the second largest number (59 million), followed by North Africa and Western Asia (nearly 50 million). Since the 1990s, the region of North Africa and Western Asia has emerged as a major destination for international migrants, concentrated mostly in countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (see figure V).

Figure V
Number of international migrants by region of destination, 1995–2020



Source: United Nations, *International migrant stock 2020*, United Nations database.

Note: Ordered by size in 2020.

¹¹ International Migration 2020 Highlights (United Nations publication, 2020).

¹² Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Global trends report 2022", 2023.

International migrants predominantly originate from middle-income countries. Some 13 per cent of the total, however, come from low-income countries, of which about half are refugees or asylum-seekers. In 2020, nearly half of all international migrants globally were living in their region of origin. Europe had the largest share of intraregional migration, with 70 per cent of all migrants born in Europe residing in another European country. By contrast, about three quarters of migrants from Central and South Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and North America were residing outside their region of origin.

International migrants contribute to the development of countries and communities of both origin and destination. In 2022, migrants sent home \$831 billion in remittances, of which \$647 billion went to low- or middle-income countries. In places of origin, remittances help to boost household incomes, reduce poverty, increase school enrolments, improve access to health care, improve agricultural productivity, facilitate financial inclusion and support business creation. International migration can also benefit places of origin by promoting foreign direct investment, especially from diaspora communities, by fostering the transfer of skills and technology and by encouraging bilateral trade.

In destination countries, migrants often play a crucial role in economies and societies by providing critical skills and labour. International migration can also have a positive impact on the demographics of receiving countries by delaying or lessening the extent of population ageing and by slowing or averting population decline. International migration can, at least temporarily, ease fiscal pressures on public pension and healthcare systems in host countries with rapidly ageing populations, especially if migrants find employment in the formal labour market.

In Target 10.7 of the 2030 Agenda, countries are explicitly called upon to “facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies”, a call that was heeded and expanded in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (resolution [73/195](#)). At the same time, those who wish to migrate should be aware of the risks associated with irregular and unsafe movements, including the risk of trafficking in persons, and should be informed about immigration requirements and labour market and living conditions in countries of destination.

Respecting, protecting and fulfilling the rights of all migrants, irrespective of their migration status, facilitates their inclusion in host societies and enhances the development potential of migration.



Moscow Russia: "Arrival of the train from Tashkent. Labour migrants buy train tickets a month ahead, as spring is the beginning of the working season." 16/04/2013. IOM Photo/Elyor Nematov.

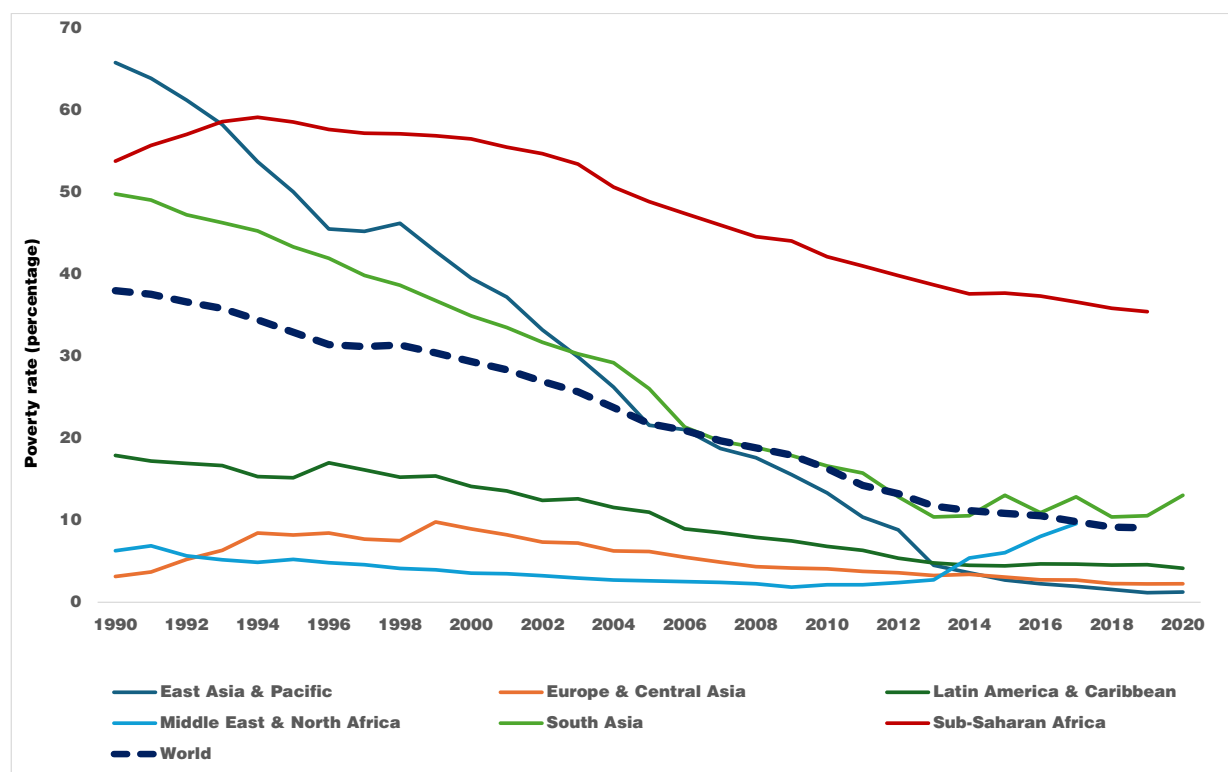
VI. Other cross-cutting issues

Population trends and the eradication of poverty

In the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, Member States committed to “cooperate in the essential task of eradicating poverty as an indispensable requirement for sustainable development”, an aspiration that was later included as the first of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

Over the past three decades, significant progress has been made globally in reducing poverty. Between 1990 and 2013, poverty declined from 37.8 per cent of the world’s population to 11.7 per cent, resulting in a drop of over 1 billion in the number of people living in extreme poverty. The global prevalence of extreme poverty fell further to 8.5 per cent in 2019 (see figure VI).¹³

Figure VI
Global and regional poverty estimates, 1990–2020



Source: World Bank, "Poverty and inequality platform".

Poverty has remained highly concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa, which accounted for 60 per cent of the global poor in 2019. Approximately 35 per cent of the region’s population, or 389 million people, lived below the international poverty line. State fragility, conflict, socioeconomic inequality, limited availability of public services, high levels of fertility and rapid population growth were contributing factors.

¹³ World Bank, "Poverty and inequality platform".

Developing countries and regions that manage to expand access to education and healthcare services, including for reproductive health and family planning, can accelerate the transition from high to low fertility rates, with benefits for national economies and for the reduction of extreme poverty. Noteworthy success cases include China and India, where robust economic growth and slower rates of population increase have led to significant reductions in poverty rates. China achieved the elimination of extreme poverty by December 2020, and India reduced the prevalence of extreme poverty to 6 per cent by 2019.¹⁴

The COVID-19 pandemic pushed an additional 71 million people into extreme poverty between 2020 and 2022, mostly in countries and regions experiencing rapid population growth, representing a major setback in progress towards the goal of ending poverty by 2030.

Demographic change and gender equality

The Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development includes a range of goals and objectives related to gender equality and the empowerment of women. In principle 4, it is affirmed that “[a]dvancing gender equality and equity and the empowerment of women, and the elimination of all kinds of violence against women, and ensuring women’s ability to control their own fertility, are cornerstones of population and development-related programmes”. The Programme of Action also contains a chapter on gender equality, equity and empowerment of women, with sections on the empowerment and status of women, the girl child and male responsibilities and participation.

Significant progress has been made in improving access and reducing gender gaps in education, health outcomes and living conditions. In 2020, the global gender gap in out-of-school rates for primary and secondary levels of education was less than 2 per cent. At the global level, girls have an advantage over boys regarding completion rates in primary and secondary education, with timely completion 2 percentage points higher for girls than for boys in 2020. However, girls’ completion rates at the upper-secondary level lag behind those of boys in Central and South Asia and in sub-Saharan Africa ([E/CN.9/2023/2](#)).

Women and girls have had a long-standing advantage in enrolment, educational achievement and school performance in some regions, such as Latin America and the Caribbean, where secondary level completion rates are 67.4 per cent for women ages 20 to 24 and 60.9 per cent for men in the same age group. Women’s enrolment ratios in higher education exceed men’s by 5 to 45 per cent, depending on the country. Those gains, however, have not translated into equivalent success in the labour market, where women remain at a disadvantage in most countries. Globally, the labour force participation rate among women remains below their male counterparts in every age group,¹⁵ which reflects, on the one hand, gender-based patterns and norms that constrain the ability of women to participate in the formal labour force and, on the other, the unpaid work that goes unrecognized in standard labour and economic statistics.

Population processes and human rights

In the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, the applicability of universally recognized human rights standards to all aspects of population policies and programmes was affirmed. Those rights include the right to life, the right to an adequate standard of living, reproductive rights, the right to development, the right to the enjoyment of the highest possible level of health and the right to education, many of which had already been recognized in national and international laws, international human rights instruments and other consensus-based agreements.

Regarding the right to life and the right to the enjoyment of good health, impressive progress has been made in reducing mortality and improving health conditions, but gaps remain between and within countries, which deserve priority attention.

¹⁴ Homi Kharas and Meagan Dooley, “The evolution of global poverty, 1990–2030”, Brookings Global Working Paper, No. 166 (Washington, D.C., Brookings Institution, 2022).

¹⁵ *Leaving No One Behind in an Ageing World: World Social Report 2023* (United Nations publication, 2023).

The aspiration that all women and couples should be able to exercise their reproductive rights and achieve a high standard of sexual and reproductive health was reaffirmed in the 2030 Agenda, including as part of Goal 3, “Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages”. Access to reproductive healthcare services, including contraceptives, has expanded greatly since 1994, yet there are still 164 million women of reproductive age (8 per cent globally) whose family planning needs are unmet (i.e. they want to delay or avoid pregnancy but are not using any contraceptive method).

Unrealized fertility, defined as a failure to achieve a desired level of fertility, is common. In a study from 19 European countries and the United States of America, it was shown that women had, on average, fewer children than desired, and many remained childless against their wishes. The increase in access to new technologies for the treatment of infertility in the past three decades has provided a partial remedy, and such technologies may become more significant in the future.

Combating child marriage and reducing adolescent fertility

Child marriage and early adolescent pregnancies remain serious problems in some parts of the world,¹⁶ reflecting situations in which the human rights of children and young people are not fully respected. In the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, Governments are called upon to adopt and enforce measures to eliminate child marriages and to reduce early childbearing, as both child marriage and early childbearing are recognized as impediments to improving the educational, economic and social status of women.

During the past two decades, child marriage has declined in varying degrees across regions. In sub-Saharan Africa, the proportion of women ages 20 to 24 who were married by age 15 declined from 15 per cent in 2001 to 11 per cent in 2021, while those married by age 18 declined from 39 per cent to 35 per cent. Faster progress is possible, however. For example, in South Asia, mainly due to trends in India, the proportion of women ages 20 to 24 who were married by age 15 declined from 26 per cent in 2001 to 7 per cent in 2021, while those married by age 18 declined from 59 per cent to 23 per cent.

Pregnancy among girls ages 10 to 14 is uncommon compared with older adolescents yet it remains a serious health and rights problem in many countries. While concerns are expressed in the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development regarding high levels of adolescent childbearing, the adolescent birth rate (for girls ages 10 to 14 and 15 to 19) has been integrated into indicators for Sustainable Development Goal target 3.7 on ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services.

The right to education

Education is one of the most important means of empowering individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to take advantage of opportunities, participate fully in society, meet their basic human needs and exercise their human rights. The right to education, set forth in article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is emphasized in the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and included as Goal 4 of the 2030 Agenda.

Expanding educational opportunities and ensuring quality education for all continues to be particularly challenging for low-income and lower-middle-income countries with growing cohorts of children and young people. For example, in sub Saharan Africa, the completion rate for upper secondary education increased by less than 7 percentage points, from 20 per cent to 27 per cent, between 2000 and 2021.

A large body of research has identified education as a key determinant of levels and trends in fertility, mortality and propensity to migrate, thereby affecting all components of population dynamics. A healthy, well-educated workforce reinforces the positive impacts of the demographic dividend and dampens the fiscal and economic costs associated with rapidly ageing populations, while contributing to the achievement of multiple Goals.

National spending on education and health for people under the age of 25 averages about 5 per cent of GDP across countries. The ratio of spending per person to GDP per capita, however, varies widely across countries and tends to be negatively associated with the ratio of young people to people of prime working age, which illustrates the trade-off between fertility levels and per capita investments in human capital.

¹⁶ United Nations Population Fund, “Motherhood in Childhood: facing the challenge of adolescent pregnancy”, State of the World Population 2013 (New York, 2013).

Planning ahead for the population's future education, health and other needs requires demographic foresight, which involves anticipating the nature and consequences of major population shifts before they occur and while they are occurring and adopting forward-looking and proactive policies guided by such analysis.



UN Photo/Emmanuel Tobey



UN Photo/Loey Felipe



Photo: World Bank/Genti Shkullakut



Photo: UNICEF Ethiopia/2023/Ayene

VII. Recommendations

Renewing the political commitment to fully realize the goals of the International Conference on Population and Development should include collective efforts by Governments, civil society and other stakeholders to implement evidence-based population and development policies. Multilateral cooperation will be needed even more than before to tackle development issues in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world.

Governments should work to further strengthen healthcare systems to provide equitable and universal access to quality, integrated and comprehensive sexual and reproductive healthcare services, while protecting, respecting and fulfilling the human rights of all persons, including their reproductive rights. This will continue to be relevant to those with unmet needs for family planning and will be increasingly relevant to those who have fewer children than they desire.

Governments should also continue to institute or strengthen policies to promote the full involvement of men and boys in all aspects of family life, to rebalance gender roles and to redistribute unpaid care work more equally between women and men. Policies aimed at balancing work and family responsibilities include creating family-friendly and gender-sensitive work environments and providing flexible working arrangements, affordable care and support for young children and other dependants, and access to maternity, paternity, parental, family and other forms of leave. Priority should be given to policies that remove barriers to women's full participation in the labour force and that recognize and value unpaid care and household work.

Policies aimed at reducing the unmet need for family planning, enforcing laws on the minimum legal age of marriage, integrating family planning and safe motherhood programmes into primary health care and improving access to education should be prioritized and strengthened, especially in developing countries. In medium- and high-fertility countries, increased access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services and to safe and effective methods of family planning can enable faster declines in fertility and help to accelerate economic and social development.

As the demographic transition progresses, countries should formulate and implement policies aimed at addressing population ageing by reforming health and social protection systems and by developing sustainable systems for long-term care.

Efforts to strengthen social protection systems should be complemented with relevant labour market reforms, including the gradual phasing-in of higher statutory retirement ages, the expansion of flexible or part-time employment options and the promotion of age-friendly work environments, multigenerational workforces and programmes to support healthy ageing.

Governments should work to expand opportunities for lifelong learning and gainful employment at older ages for those who can and wish to work, while also promoting digital literacy and facilitating access to new information and communications technologies among older persons.

Governments should enact policies and programmes to support well-planned, sustainable urbanization, with priority being given to facilitating access to housing and decent work; building sustainable infrastructure, including safe water, sanitation and waste management; creating efficient energy, transportation and communication systems; minimizing the number of persons living in slums and inadequate housing; and maintaining green spaces and a healthy environment within and around urban areas.

In an increasingly integrated global economy with increased international mobility, policies aimed at maximizing the benefits of international migration and minimizing its negative effects will be even more important than in past decades. Governments should protect the rights of all international migrants and their families, regardless of their migration status and without discrimination, in both sending and receiving countries, by ensuring access to essential services, health care, education, decent work, social security and justice.

Governments should cooperate with each other to reduce the vulnerabilities of migrants, especially children and migrant workers, to end unfair labour practices, to promote fair and ethical recruitment, to facilitate the portability of social security benefits, to recognize skills and qualifications acquired abroad and to plan for and address migratory flows caused by environmental degradation, including climate change.

Governments should continue to work towards the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls and towards ending widespread and harmful social practices, including child, early and forced marriages and female genital mutilation.

Tracking progress in combating inequalities within and between countries requires timely, high-quality disaggregated demographic data. With a view to supporting policies and programmes that are data-driven and evidence-based, Governments should work to strengthen the capacity of local and national institutions to collect, process and use disaggregated data and to carry out foresight policy analysis.



Informal plenary meeting of the General Assembly to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the ICPD Programme of Action. New York: Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed addresses General Assembly, 29/4/2024. Loey Felipe/United Nations Photo.

Annex I

Declaration on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development¹

We, the Ministers and representatives of Governments, gathered at the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on Population and Development, from 29 April to 3 May 2024 in New York, on the special occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo in 1994, in the context of the review and appraisal of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development² and its contribution to the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,³

1. Reaffirm the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the key actions for its further implementation,⁴ and the outcomes of its reviews, and note the outcome documents of the regional review conferences, stressing that the outcome documents of the regional review conferences provide region-specific guidance on population and development for each region that adopted the particular outcome documents;
2. Renew our determination to advance the full, effective and accelerated implementation of the Programme of Action, to address its unfinished business with a sense of urgency, duty and responsibility, in the spirit of international cooperation, global partnership and solidarity, and to reinforce the interlinkages between population and development in relevant multilateral processes, deeply convinced that the Programme of Action remains as relevant as it was 30 years ago;
3. Recognize that, in a demographically diverse world, population dynamics, including differences in the pace of population growth or decline, changing population age structures, urbanization and international migration, will continue to shape the world for present and future generations;
4. Welcome the progress made thus far towards achieving the goals and objectives of the Programme of Action and the Sustainable Development Goals, and stress that challenges and obstacles remain in the implementation of the Programme of Action and, in this regard, pledge to undertake further action to ensure its full and accelerated implementation;
5. Are deeply convinced that the full implementation of the Programme of Action and the key actions for its further implementation is crucial to fulfil the vision of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to accelerate its implementation, and that the two agendas are mutually reinforcing and must be boldly translated into effective action by all stakeholders, balancing the three dimensions of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental – in an integrated manner, and seeking to realize the human rights of all, including the right to development, and to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls;
6. Recognize that the Programme of Action requires for its full implementation both increased political will at all levels and adequate and sufficient mobilization of resources at the national and international levels, as well as predictable, sustainable and sufficient development finance to developing countries from all sources, and that Governments are not expected to meet the goals and objectives of the Programme of Action single-handedly, and reaffirm our commitment to accelerate the full implementation of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development⁷ and to take further actions to scale up financing for sustainable development;
7. Encourage Governments, international organizations, including those of the United Nations system, international financial institutions and other relevant stakeholders to assist developing countries in implementing the Programme of Action, by enhancing North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation on and access to science, technology and innovation, and capacity-building activities;

¹ Commission on Population and Development, Report on the fifty-seventh session (14 April 2023 and 29 April–3 May 2024), E/2024/25-E/CN.9/2024/6.

² Report of the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 5–13 September 1994 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.95.XIII.18), chap. I, resolution 1, annex.

³ General Assembly resolution 70/1.

⁴ General Assembly resolution S-21/2, annex.

8. Commit to promote the availability of and access to high-quality, timely, relevant, disaggregated and reliable population data, which are essential for implementing and monitoring the Programme of Action and measuring progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda, strengthen research on the linkages between population and sustainable development, and take account of population trends and projections in development strategies and policies;
9. Call upon the United Nations system, international and regional organizations and all sectors of civil society, including non-governmental organizations, to fully commit themselves and to intensify their contributions to the full, effective and accelerated implementation of the Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda.

Annex II.

Overview of discussions on agenda item 3 at the 57th session of the Commission on Population and Development¹

On the morning of 30 April 2024, the Commission heard a high-level panel on the key findings and recommendations of the regional conferences on population and development convened by the five United Nations regional economic commissions in late 2023. The regional reviews served to highlight the important contributions of the Programme of Action to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the population and development agendas at the regional level. The regions had seen considerable improvements in core areas such as health and life expectancy, educational attainment, gender gaps in employment, and access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services. In addition, the reviews served to underscore how current and future population trends, including high fertility, population aging, migration and urbanization, might create both challenges and opportunities for sustainable development beyond 2030. The panel noted that, notwithstanding political commitment and increased stakeholder involvement, progress had been uneven across and within regions. The ensuing debate highlighted that, in recent years, progress had slowed or even been reversed in some countries and regions for various reasons, including environmental degradation, climate change, conflicts, deepening socioeconomic disparities and the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

On the morning of Wednesday, 1 May, the Commission heard a multi-stakeholder panel on the special theme of the session, featuring panellists from academia, civil society and youth groups. Speakers agreed that progress had been uneven and that challenges had been worsened by multiple crises, including climate change, global economic setbacks, violent conflicts and political instability. Enhanced international cooperation and multi-stakeholder partnerships, as well as the consistent use of population data for effective policymaking, were regarded as crucial for addressing the existing challenges and making further progress. In countries of Africa, investments in human capital and the creation of opportunities for decent work were essential for harnessing the demographic dividend. Women and girls still faced challenges in the fulfilment of their human rights, often resulting in lower levels of educational attainment and a reduced ability to benefit from economic opportunities. In that regard, actions to accelerate the attainment of goals in the area of sexual and reproductive health were essential for reducing maternal mortality and lowering the unmet need for family planning. Other areas where accelerated implementation was needed were urbanization and migration, which could lead to exacerbated inequalities and increased vulnerabilities if not well planned and well managed. Speakers also stressed the importance of engaging young people in the full and effective implementation of the Programme of Action and ensuring that current and future generations could realize their full potential.

During the general debate, Member States reiterated their commitment to the implementation of the Programme of Action and the implementation of the regional population and development agendas, and they underscored the importance of implementing the Programme of Action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda. Speakers highlighted the progress made since the Cairo Conference, in particular in reducing infant, child and maternal mortality and increasing life expectancy, reducing poverty, boosting access to education, reducing child marriage and adolescent childbearing and improving access to sexual and reproductive health care and reproductive rights. However, some challenges that impeded implementation persisted, including socioeconomic inequalities, youth unemployment, environmental degradation, climate change, violent conflicts and humanitarian crises. Some delegations underlined that current and future demographic trends, such as high or low levels of fertility, population growth or decline, population ageing, international migration and urbanization, might pose added challenges if not well managed. In many statements, speakers acknowledged that developing countries needed increased resources to advance the implementation of the Programme of Action, and some highlighted the need to reform the international financial architecture to support those countries. To harness the demographic dividend, in particular in the African continent, it was essential to increase investments in the human capital of young people and to increase their opportunities for employment. Other countries highlighted the importance of focusing on population ageing and promoting more active, healthier and longer lives. Many countries noted the importance of respecting national sovereignty in the implementation of the Programme of Action and the need to protect and support the family through family-oriented policies. Many other countries stressed the importance of promoting access to comprehensive sexuality education and to sexual and reproductive health and rights, combating gender-based violence, eliminating all forms of discrimination and changing negative social norms to ensure gender equality and women's empowerment. Speakers also highlighted the importance of high-quality, timely, relevant and disaggregated population data and the need to strengthen data systems and improve national capacities to collect, produce and analyse population data for planning and SDG monitoring.

¹ Commission on Population and Development, Report on the fifty-seventh session (14 April 2023 and 29 April–3 May 2024), E/2024/25-E/CN.9/2024/6.



New York: The opening of the 57th Session of the Commission on Population and Development. 29/4/2024.
Loey Felipe/United Nations Photo.

Annex III. Informal plenary meeting of the General Assembly to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development

Monday, 29 April 2024, 3 p.m., General Assembly Hall

Informal summary prepared by the Population Division/United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Introduction

In accordance with decision 2022/332 of the Economic and Social Council, the General Assembly convened an informal plenary meeting to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) at the United Nations Headquarters in the afternoon of 29 April 2024.

Members States acknowledged the continuing relevance of the ICPD Programme of Action, adopted by 179 States in Cairo, Egypt in 1994; the contribution of the Programme of Action to implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; the political declaration on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Programme of Action, adopted by the Commission on Population and Development in the morning of 29 April 2024; and the need for the full and accelerated implementation of the Programme of Action. Speakers looked forward to the Summit of the Future, to be held in New York on 22-23 September 2024, and its resulting action-oriented Pact for the Future.

Opening Statements

H.E. Mr. Dennis Francis, President of the 78th session of the General Assembly, highlighted the importance of the ICPD Programme of Action in enhancing quality of life, reducing poverty and addressing sustainability challenges, noting the progress made in several areas including poverty reduction, increased life expectancy and expanded access to education, particularly for girls. At the same time, he acknowledged that challenges persisted, with global crises such as climate change and conflict threatening hard-won gains. He underscored the importance of gender equality, poverty reduction and empowering vulnerable groups for achieving sustainable development, and he called for a renewed commitment to the ICPD agenda in ongoing negotiations on the outcome document of the Summit of the Future. He emphasized the need to bridge gender gaps and reduce socio-economic inequalities to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Mr. Francis concluded with a call to reestablish common ground and rededicate efforts to a shared future of peace, prosperity and sustainability for all.

Dr. Natalia Kanem, Executive Director of United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) speaking on behalf of the Secretary-General, reflected on the transformative impact of the Programme of Action, stressing the notable achievements that had been made in reducing maternal mortality, increasing contraceptive use and addressing gender inequalities. She noted, however, that progress was slowing, with widening inequalities and a pushback against women's rights. Dr. Kanem emphasized youth empowerment and upcoming global dialogues and reiterated UNFPA's commitment to reproductive health and rights, calling for continued investment and urgent action to realize the vision of Cairo for all individuals, especially women and girls, ensuring a brighter future of rights and choices for all.

Mr. Li Junhua, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, stressed that the ICPD marked a significant milestone in prioritizing people's rights in development. He noted that despite progress made since 1994 in health, education and gender equality, challenges persisted. He acknowledged that leveraging the ICPD Programme of Action was crucial for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, stressing the necessity to invest in youth and address the needs of older persons. He called for greater collaboration to fulfill the ICPD's promise and to ensure that no one was left behind, while meeting the needs of current and future generations.

H.E. Maria Fernanda Espinosa, Executive Director, Global Women Voices, and President of the General Assembly at its 73rd session, identified the ICPD Programme of Action as an outstanding example of multilateral achievement, collective vision and commitment. She argued that overlapping global crises disproportionately affected women and girls and noted that collective action was urgently needed to address both old and emerging challenges, including the worrisome erosion of women's empowerment and rights.

Ms. Ashley Judd, UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador, expressed gratitude for the 30th anniversary of the ICPD, highlighting its visionary focus on reproductive autonomy, gender equality and sustainable development. She shared her experiences of interacting with women and girls, many of whom were fleeing persecution and conflict. For these women, gender inequality and lack of access to family planning further accentuated their vulnerability, impacting their lives and limiting their opportunities and choices. Ms. Judd underscored the importance of UNFPA's work and advocated for continued collective efforts to address the remaining challenges.

Ms. Victoria Flamant, youth representative, shared her vision of hope, outlining five priority areas identified by youth at the ICPD30 Global Youth Dialogue held in Cotonou, Benin, from 4 to 5 April 2024, and calling for action to follow up on these recommendations. She also called for investing in young people to enhance their potential and leveraging technology, expressing confidence in youth's ability to bring about positive change.

Statements by Member States and observers

A total of 54 Member States and one observer State took the floor to deliver statements in their national capacity, as well as on behalf of groups of countries, including the Nordic countries; the Benelux countries; Canada, Australia and New Zealand (CANZ); the Group of Friends of the Family; the European Union and a cross-regional group of 81 Governments.

Speakers noted that the adoption of the ICPD Programme of Action had represented a paradigm shift in the discourse on population and development, highlighting the centrality of the needs and rights of people and of gender equality and autonomy for achieving sustainable development and for improving the well-being of all. Thirty years after its adoption, the ICPD Programme of Action still stood as a global anchor for a human-centered, rights-based approach to development.

Its implementation had contributed to many achievements. In 2024, people across the world enjoyed longer and healthier lives than in 1994. Many Member States had made considerable progress in reducing maternal, infant and child mortality. The percentage of women with unmet need for family planning and the prevalence of child marriage, gender-based violence and harmful practices against women and girls had declined. There had also been important gains in women's empowerment and gender equality, in child and adolescent education, especially for girls, and in the protection and promotion of sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Despite these many gains, in some areas progress in implementing the ICPD Programme of Action had been uneven or insufficient. In this regard, Member States highlighted both existing and new challenges, calling for urgent attention to:

- Accelerate efforts to eradicate poverty and address the persistence or rise of inequalities driven by crises and conflicts;
- End maternal deaths, gender-based violence and unmet need for family planning;
- Meet the needs of large youth populations in terms of education and employment;
- Create the conditions to reap the full benefits of the demographic dividend;
- Address the challenges related to low fertility, population ageing and the specific needs of older people;
- Support the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, which continued to negatively impact the economies and health systems in a significant number of countries;
- Mitigate the adverse effects of climate change and environmental degradation on populations everywhere, especially in the most vulnerable countries.

To address these challenges, several priorities were identified:

- To seize the opportunity of the upcoming Summit of the Future, countries reiterated the relevance of the ICPD Programme of Action for the Decade of Action and Delivery for accelerating progress towards the achievement of sustainable development and called for a reaffirmation of the visionary and actionable pact set forth in the ICPD Programme of Action;

- In the area of international cooperation, solidarity and partnerships, countries called for addressing gaps and challenges, especially by reaching and empowering the most marginalized and vulnerable groups, and ensuring that no one is left behind;
- To enhance the collection and use of sound demographic data for policy making, governments called for investments in population and housing census activities and for the strengthening and maintenance of civil registration systems;
- In the areas of technical support and capacity building, the continued and instrumental support provided by the United Nations system, especially UNFPA, was highlighted.



New York: The opening of the 57th Session of the Commission on Population and Development. 29/4/2024.
Loey Felipe/United Nations Photo.

Thirty years after Cairo: Major trends, progress made and challenges ahead provides an overview of major shifts in population and development trajectories since the adoption of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, three decades ago. Considerable progress has been achieved on many of the goals and objectives of the Programme of Action, including improved overall and maternal and child health, reduced poverty, increased education and gender equality. This progress has, however, been uneven and insufficient in some areas, while new population and development challenges have emerged. Climate change and other environmental issues pose increasing threats to sustainability, vulnerable and marginalized populations remain left behind, inequalities in income and wealth have increased, and challenges to the exercise of individual rights in many countries persist. This report identifies key gaps and emerging population and development challenges, opportunities and policy priorities for the coming decades.

The report is part of a series on major demographic trends being published by the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Reports in the series examine the complex relationships linking demographic processes to social and economic development and environmental change.

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