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Population Division
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United Nations expert consultation series on population, technology and research in the context of sustainable development

New York, 21 to 30 October 2025

Report of the meeting

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The Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs provides the international community with timely and accessible population data and analysis of population trends and development outcomes for all countries and areas of the world. To this end, the Division undertakes regular studies of population size and characteristics and of all three components of population change (fertility, mortality and migration). Founded in 1946, the Population Division provides substantive support on population and development issues to the United Nations General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on Population and Development. It also leads or participates in various interagency coordination mechanisms of the United Nations system. The work of the Division also contributes to strengthening the capacity of Member States to monitor population trends and to address current and emerging population issues.

Notes

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EXPLANATORY NOTES

Symbols of United Nations documents are composed of capital letters combined with figures.

The following abbreviations are used in the report:

AI	Artificial intelligence
CPD	Commission on Population and Development
HIC	High-income country
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
ICPD	International Conference on Population and Development
ICT	Information and communications technology
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
LIC	Low-income country
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UN DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UN ECLAC	United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
UN ESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	World Health Organization

1. Background and scope of the consultation series

The special theme of the 59th session of the Commission on Population and Development (CPD), taking place in April 2026, is “Population, technology and research in the context of sustainable development”. Profound changes in the technological landscape have taken place since the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo in 1994. ICPD took place in the early days of commercial use of the Internet and world wide web; since then, the world has seen widespread adoption of mobile communication, new forms of communication such as social media, massive increases in digital data systems, advances in biotechnology and health science and renewable energy, and most recently, artificial intelligence (AI).

The ICPD Programme of Action contained a chapter on “Technology, research and development” that covered basic data collection, analysis and dissemination, reproductive health research and social and economic research. Yet the profound transformations of the technological landscape impact the commitments and policy recommendations of every chapter.

Technological advancements have boosted ICPD implementation by expanding access to reproductive health services, improving data collection and monitoring, empowering individuals through digital education, and enhancing collaboration, coordination and advocacy through online platforms.

Technological change has, in some cases, exacerbated inequalities and created new divides and challenges, including, for example, unequal access between countries, and within countries for women, the poor, older persons or marginalized groups; data security and privacy; cyber-bullying and rapid spread of misinformation or unvetted information.

The Programme of Action continues to provide the crucial normative foundation for policies in population and sustainable development, which should harness technological innovation while protecting human rights and ensuring that no one is left behind.

While recognizing the breadth of impacts of technology across the Programme of Action topic areas, as well as the vast scope of research that has strengthened the evidence base for policies relevant to population and sustainable development, the report of the Secretary-General on the special theme of the session will focus on selected aspects that intersect with demographic trends and where normative guidance of the CPD is particularly salient. The report will both highlight evidence on the impact of technological change and take a forward-looking view of advancements on the horizon.

As part of the substantive preparations for the annual session, the Population Division of UN DESA convened a series of four expert consultations during October 2025 to discuss selected aspects of the special theme. The consultations brought together experts from various sectors and regions to review key developments and evidence most critical to bring to the attention of the Commission. This report summarizes the presentations and discussions that took place during the consultations, including recommendations put forward by the invited experts.

2. Summary of sessions

A. Session I: Population data innovations: collection, analysis and use (21 October 2025)

John Wilmoth, Director of the Population Division, opened the meeting. He indicated that profound transformations in the technological landscape impacted the commitments and policy recommendations across all chapters of the ICPD Programme of Action. He explained that the consultation series would examine four key areas: innovations in population data, technology and research in sexual and reproductive health, technological advances supporting healthy ageing, and issues around digital inclusion. Mr. Wilmoth also invited participants to reflect on three overarching questions: how advances in technology had led to better policymaking; how potential harms could be mitigated while safeguarding privacy, safety and equity; and how the CPD could best amplify and complement existing recommendations on technology and research, including those in the Global Digital Compact, to ensure that the ICPD agenda remained responsive to emerging issues.

Cheryl Sawyer, Chief of the Population Trends and Analysis Branch of the Population Division, presented an overview situating innovations in population data within the ICPD Programme of Action and subsequent CPD resolutions. She noted that while Chapter XII of the Programme of Action contained no specific references to technologies, it underscored the central importance of demographic data for policy and planning. Ms. Sawyer outlined the evolution of international guidance on population data systems, from the 1994 ICPD Programme of Action's call for countries to strengthen national capacities in data collection and analysis, to the 1999 key actions urging the UN and donor support for census, survey, and vital registration systems in developing countries. By 2016, CPD resolutions had expanded this framework to include leveraging new data sources, such as big data, georeferencing, and open data policies. She explained that the meeting would explore innovations in traditional data sources, integration of georeferenced and population datasets, and the use of artificial intelligence and machine learning to enhance policymaking and programme delivery.

Sathya Doraiswamy, Senior Programme Advisor at the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), complemented these remarks by reaffirming that population ageing, urbanization, inequality, migration and climate displacement were reshaping global population dynamics, illustrating the need for robust, high-quality data. He cautioned that despite technological advances, many countries continued to face challenges in completing or releasing accurate censuses, leaving millions uncounted, while declining international funding risked a global "data emergency." He cited examples of national innovations, including Mongolia's hybrid census, which combines register-based and traditional enumeration methods, Nepal's artificial intelligence (AI)-powered Semantic Intelligence for Transformative Analysis tool, and the use of digital trace and geospatial data to monitor migration and displacement. He warned of ethical concerns regarding privacy, data ownership, and potential misuse, and concluded by calling for a rights-based global data governance framework, greater investment in integrated data systems, stronger capacity-building, and urgent action to close persistent gender data gaps, noting that 44 per cent of gender-related SDG indicators remained unmeasured.

The panel session, moderated by Francesca Grum, Chief of the Demographic and Social Statistics Branch of the Statistics Division, UN DESA, featured three expert presentations on technological advancements in population data systems.

Federico Segui, Director of Coordination and International Relations at the National Statistical Office of Uruguay, presented on technological advancements in census and administrative data. Uruguay's model, inspired by Nordic systems, linked population, business and real estate data using personal and business identification numbers at the microdata level. Uruguay had built a statistical population register by integrating administrative sources from multiple agencies, as the country lacked a central population register. The statistical data warehouse received data from different sources, applied transformation procedures, and enabled the production of multidimensional analysis across time, people and place of residence. For the 2020 census, Uruguay implemented a multimodal approach (60 per cent of responses through self-enumeration) supported by chatbots and combined census questionnaires with data from the Statistical Population Register to address an approximately 10 per cent omission rate, using deterministic and probabilistic record linkage to complement enumeration. Mr. Segui remarked that, despite technical progress, major obstacles remained in data sharing among institutions and national coordination.

Andrew Tatem, Professor of Spatial Demography and Epidemiology at the University of Southampton and Director of WorldPop, presented geospatial data for policy and planning. He explained that WorldPop addressed challenges with outdated, incomplete, inaccurate, or too coarse population data by combining satellite imagery with AI-powered building extraction, nighttime lights, and mobile phone data to map population distribution. The program produced 100-by-100-meter gridded population estimates that could be aggregated to different administrative boundaries or linked to facilities for proximity-based analysis. Using disaggregation from administrative counts and bottom-up estimation using sample sources. WorldPop had supported diverse applications, connecting gridded census data with schools in Sierra Leone, disaster risk assessments in Latin America and the Caribbean, vaccination campaigns in Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo and census preparation improvements in Benin, Mali and Burkina Faso. Mr. Tatem underlined the importance of co-developing methods with national statistics offices and investing in capacity building, stating that initial engagement with Colombia had led to regional workshops supporting eight countries. He observed that these geospatial approaches had been used for about 10 years and adopted by 20 to 30 countries and should perhaps be considered as established rather than perceived as "new and innovative".

Sibusiso Mkwananzi, Senior Researcher at the University of Witwatersrand and Commissioner of the National Planning Council of South Africa, presented on leveraging data science and machine learning for urban climate adaptation. She stated that cities faced intensified climate risks, with vulnerable groups bearing disproportionate burdens, and explained that data science integrated diverse datasets that generated predictive insights and bridged gaps between research, practice and policy. She also clarified that machine learning complemented rather than replaced traditional statistical methods. Ms. Mkwananzi shared two South African case studies: the Heat Adaptation for Pregnant Women and Infants study, which examined heat impacts on pregnant women and infants across 20 informal settlements using sensors, wearables and interviews to develop predictive analytics; and the High Horizons study on healthcare workers, which used facility monitoring and a co-designed smartphone heat alert application that produced strong results. She described both projects as part of a continuum from data science to machine learning—where predictive analysis set the foundation for future machine learning applications in risk classification and personalized adaptation planning. Ms. Mkwananzi concluded that climate adaptation required evidence-driven innovation, with data science providing rigor and machine learning offering scalability and precision important for African settings.

Participants raised questions about cost, resource and capacity implications of adopting innovative data systems, particularly their scalability for countries with total large populations or large rural populations. Presenters explained that while technology investments were substantial, the primary challenges lay in data sharing and institutional coordination rather than information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure. Cloud computing was noted as capable of efficiently managing millions of records, making technical scalability feasible. The main barriers involved establishing effective data governance frameworks and institutional coordination mechanisms. The substantial cost difference between traditional and register-based approaches was highlighted, with register-based census operations costing approximately $0.10 per person compared to $7 for traditional enumeration. Participants also raised questions about ethical standards and accountability in the use of AI, geospatial and trace data, and how to balance innovation with privacy protection. Presenters described secure systems such as microdata laboratories, offering both physical and virtual access to anonymized data under confidentiality checks, which are increasingly in demand among national statistical systems, universities and researchers.

Discussions further explored how integrating climate and population data could inform equitable adaptation policies that address gendered impacts of environmental stress, displacement and resource scarcity. Presenters explained that geospatial formats made it possible to link climatic events, such as floods and hurricanes, with population data for disaster risk assessment, underscoring the value of collaboration between population, health and climate experts. In their recommendations for policymakers, presenters called for continued investment in traditional data sources as the foundation for validating innovative methods, while using AI and geospatial tools to fill data gaps. They also stressed that health was the human face of climate change, urging policymakers to strengthen climate resilience in health systems and develop climate health indicators for vulnerable communities. Finally, they highlighted the importance of capacity building and South-South cooperation to ensure that all countries benefitted equitably from technological advances.

The moderator opened the floor for broader discussion on challenges, risks, benefits, non-traditional data sources, and funding gaps related to technological innovation in population data systems, as well as how the CPD could best amplify existing recommendations on technology and research. Participants discussed a "data winter" where access to essential data was shrinking due to rising costs and restricted platforms. Platforms that were once open or inexpensive now restricted access or required payment, impacting core capacities in routine processes like civil registration and vital statistics, business registers and population registers. Fragmentation occurred when data development work was driven by donor priorities rather than support for foundational systems. The need to rebalance funding to protect core foundational systems was emphasized, focusing on maintenance rather than only innovation, and exploring triangular and South-South cooperation arrangements.

Participants recognized the potential of AI to enhance official statistics, especially for repetitive tasks like coding, documentation, and ICT support, but pointed to recent studies which showed that 95 per cent of organizations adopting AI had not yet achieved a positive return on investment. Technological capacity alone did not guarantee value. The greatest short-term potential lay in dissemination, communication, code and ICT development, as well as administrative processes where AI could safely streamline workflows and partially offset skilled staff shortages. Success depended on strong institutional readiness and cultural acceptance. Resistance to change, legacy systems and limited human resources could undermine expected benefits. The determinant of success was not the technology itself but institutional capacity to integrate AI responsibly, combining good data governance, metadata standards, and gradual organizational adoption.

Participants also expressed concern that rapid technological advances could widen inequalities, particularly in developing countries where limited Internet access and digital literacy left populations at risk of being left behind. They pointed to the significance of education, coding skills, and equitable digital access, framing these as emerging rights in the data-driven era. Simultaneously, AI offered opportunities to reduce barriers through intuitive language tools that allow geospatial data to be more accessible.

Finally, participants acknowledged the need for sustained investment in public health and population data systems, alongside capacity building and regional collaboration through initiatives such as South-South cooperation. They highlighted that aligning progress on universal health coverage and social protection (to break cycles of poverty) was crucial to ensure that advances in technology promoted inclusion and benefitted all populations.

Ms. Sawyer closed the meeting by noting that it had successfully brought together experts from national statistical offices, academia, and international organizations to discuss modernization of population data systems, integration of diverse data sources, and the balance between traditional and innovative methods. Participants had also underscored the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration on issues such as climate change and health, and of rights-based data governance frameworks that protect privacy while supporting evidence-based policy.

B. Session II: Technology and research in sexual and reproductive health (23 October 2025)

Ms. Sawyer welcomed participants on behalf of the Director of the Population Division.

Siqi Wu, Associate Population Affairs Officer, Population Division, presented trends in fertility, reproductive health and maternal and child health. She said that fertility had declined globally, although high fertility with total fertility above 4 births per woman persisted in several low-income countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, where many girls were at heightened risk of early childbearing and child marriage and the proportion of women not using a modern method of contraception among those who want to avoid pregnancy remained high. She emphasized the importance of research and technology in addressing disparities, improving adolescent sexual and reproductive health, and expanding access to contraception and safe maternal care.

Will Zeck, Chief of the Programme Liaison Branch at UNFPA, spoke about new innovations such as AI, telemedicine, and emerging contraceptive technologies. He noted progress in rapid diagnostics and digital tools that support sexual and reproductive health and said that benefits were uneven due to gaps in infrastructure and digital literacy. He called for more investment in local innovation, stronger research capacity, and equitable access, and emphasized that women’s health, including menopause and mental health, must remain a priority in future research and technological agendas.

The panel session, moderated by Danielle Engel, Technical Advisor on Sexual and Reproductive Health at UNFPA, featured three expert presentations on technological innovations in sexual and reproductive health. Ms. Engel noted that despite progress since the ICPD, high rates of unintended pregnancy and unmet contraceptive needs remained. She said that future innovation must focus on user satisfaction, accessibility and autonomy.

Lisa Haddad, Medical Director of the Center for Biomedical Research at the Population Council and Professor of Gynecology and Obstetrics at Emory University, presented advances in contraceptive technology. She explained that although access to contraception had increased, discontinuation rates remained high because current methods did not fully meet users’ needs. Research now focuses on safer, more user-friendly and affordable contraceptives that reduce side effects and expand choice through non-hormonal and over-the-counter options. She highlighted new methods that promoted self-care and on-demand use and combined protection against both pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. She also spoke about renewed progress in male contraception and ongoing work on biodegradable inserts, microneedle patches, vaginal films and long-acting injectables. Dr. Haddad underlined that sustained investment and regulatory support were essential, as many of these methods were still in early development.

Gitau Mburu, Scientist at the Department of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Research at the World Health Organization (WHO), spoke on infertility research and technological advances. He said that about one in six people experienced infertility in their lifetime, with similar prevalence across regions and income groups. He reviewed developments in assisted reproductive technologies such as in vitro fertilization, intracytoplasmic sperm injection and uterine transplantation, and noted major inequalities in access and affordability. He described the growing use of artificial intelligence in embryo and sperm selection, telesurgery and digital fertility monitoring, and advances in biomarker identification and genotypic profiling. Dr. Mburu emphasized that regulation had not kept pace with these advances, creating risks around equity, safety and data protection. He called for stronger national guidelines, ethical standards and equitable access to infertility care.

Onikepe Owolabi, Vice President for International Research at the Guttmacher Institute, presented on research advances in sexual and reproductive health and the use of digital technology and data. She shared findings from Guttmacher's "Adding It Up 2024" study, which estimated the need for, costs and impacts of sexual and reproductive health services in 128 low and middle-income countries, focusing on contraceptive services, pregnancy-related and newborn care, and treatment for major curable STIs. She shared a new refined measure of unmet demand for contraception that emphasized a more person-centred measure reflecting women's contraceptive intentions.[1] She described research on fertility awareness-based methods and the rise of digital fertility-tracking tools, and stressed the need for clear evidence, regulation and data privacy. Dr. Owolabi explained how digital tools and artificial intelligence were improving data analysis, policy tracking and early warning systems for sexual and reproductive health. She said that while technology offered opportunities for better research and service delivery, it also raised concerns about privacy, equity and ethics, especially in settings without strong data protection.

After the three presentations, Ms. Engel thanked the panelists and concluded that all three emphasized trust, ethics, rights-based regulation, equitable access and local research capacity to ensure that technology in sexual and reproductive health remains inclusive and centred on people's needs.

Participants raised questions about infertility data, gender differences, and reproductive rights. Dr. Mburu explained that the presented data reflected all age groups within reproductive age and that risk factors for infertility differed by age, body mass index and presence of untreated infections. He said that while about 30 per cent of infertility was caused by female factors, male factors contributed to nearly half of all cases, which underscored the need for equal attention to both partners. He clarified that existing United Nations resolutions and documents affirmed the right to found a family and decide freely on the number and timing of children, but none of them explicitly defined a "right to have a child."

In response to a question regarding male infertility and cultural barriers, Dr. Mburu said that men were often reluctant to seek care due to stigma and social norms, which reinforced the perception that infertility was a woman's issue. He said that WHO's forthcoming guidelines would stress that male and female partners should be evaluated together. Dr. Haddad added that involving men more in family planning could encourage open dialogue about infertility. She also discussed new contraceptive methods, including male contraceptive options, self-injectables and user-controlled options that showed promise but required continued investment to expand access, lower costs and strengthen supply chains. Panelists agreed that fertility education and open discussion were essential to reduce stigma. Dr. Owolabi said that societal norms around masculinity and virility must be addressed through community engagement and social behavior change, drawing parallels with how HIV programs had reduced stigma through dialogue and inclusion.

The moderator invited participants to identify new developments and remaining gaps in sexual and reproductive health technology and research since the ICPD. Dr. Owolabi noted that medical technologies such as manual vacuum aspiration and medication abortion had transformed access to safe abortion care, empowering women to make informed choices. She said that digital tools had also improved data collection and access to information, but warned that misinformation and weak regulation threatened progress. She

[1] Sully E.A and others, *Adding It Up 2024: Investing in Sexual and Reproductive Health in Low- and Middle-Income Countries,* New York: Guttmacher Institute, 2025, https://www.guttmacher.org/report/adding-it-up-2024-investing-sexual-and-reproductive-health-low-and-middle-income-countries.

highlighted advances in supply chain management and health information systems that improved tracking of reproductive health outcomes but said these systems required further upscaling, especially in sub-Saharan Africa.

Dr. Haddad said that digital technologies had expanded the reach of family planning information, enabling self-care and reducing stigma. She said that framing family planning and infertility as part of a shared dialogue between partners could help shift perceptions of these topics from women's issues to human issues, supporting equality and faster adoption of new methods.

Participants also discussed misinformation, data privacy and digital divides. Dr. Haddad said that false information often spread more easily than verified facts and that institutions must find better ways to share accurate information through trusted channels. Dr. Owolabi said that improving science education and digital literacy was critical so that people could assess information critically. She added that the reproductive health community should engage more in global discussions on regulating online health information and applications, since self-regulation by private companies was insufficient. Dr. Mburu agreed, saying that stronger governance and accountability in digital health were urgently needed. The Commission on Population and Development could play a key role in promoting good governance, equitable technology transfer and stronger responses to misinformation and misuse of digital tools.

At the end of the expert consultation, Ms. Engel concluded that technology held great promise for advancing sexual and reproductive health but must be guided by principles of equity, ethics and rights. The session underscored that the ICPD Programme of Action remained highly relevant in the digital age, as it had already addressed issues such as technology transfer, male engagement and inclusion of women in research.

C. Session III: Ageing populations: technological advances for lengthening healthy, independent and active lifespans (28 October 2025)

Ms. Sawyer opened the meeting on behalf of the Director of the Population Division.

Yumiko Kamiya, Population Affairs Officer in the Population Division, set the stage for the discussion on population ageing and technology. She described the unprecedented demographic shift toward longer lives and smaller families, resulting in ageing populations around the globe. The global population aged 60 and older was projected to grow by 72 per cent by 2050 (to 2.1 billion), with the population aged 80 and above doubling in high-income countries and tripling in lower-middle-income countries. Ms. Kamiya emphasized the deep inequalities in longevity from high to lower-middle income countries, as well as gender disparities, noting that women lived longer but in poorer health and were twice as likely as men to live alone and face greater risks of social isolation. She concluded that while digital tools (AI, Internet of Things, telemedicine) offered powerful support for healthier, more independent lives, bridging the deep digital divides by age, gender, income, and geography through digital literacy, affordable access, and data privacy was critical.

Michael Herrmann, Senior Advisor at UNFPA, complemented the introductory remarks by focusing on the link between technology, capital, labour, demography, and economy. He stressed that policy implications for global ageing differed markedly by country income level. High-income countries (HIC) faced a declining labor force and would have to rely on technology, robotics, and AI to maintain productivity. Middle-income countries needed to boost labor productivity and technological progress. Low-income countries (LIC) faced the unique challenge of promoting technology while still having a growing labor force, raising potential trade-offs between technology investment and labour demand. Citing examples of digital training focused on young individuals and women (Kenya, Rwanda, India) and automation incentives (Thailand), he concluded by inviting participants to share successful programs for the UNFPA report.

Sabine Henning, Chief of the Population and Development Section at the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP), moderated the panel discussion and opened with inputs from the Regional Commissions on population ageing and technology. She framed the session by identifying population ageing and digitalization as two major global trends with significant regional variations in the scale, timing, and speed. Drawing on regional perspectives, she highlighted that digital technologies were transforming societies, yet disparities in digital infrastructure, economic conditions, and demographic factors contributed to persistent digital divides, particularly affecting older persons and those in vulnerable situations. Ms. Henning stressed the strong gender dimension of ageing and the significant gap in digital access and use, noting that ageism, design limitations, and privacy concerns were key barriers for older persons. She also highlighted technology's potential to support independent living, flexible work arrangements, and active ageing. Citing good practices such as intergenerational digital literacy clubs in Vietnam and the "Digital Spring Project" in Turkey, she called for forward-looking policies and a life-course perspective, noting that today's youth were the older persons of the future.

Kylie Shae, Team Lead for Access to Medical Devices and Assistive Technology at WHO, presented on leveraging assistive technology and digital health for healthy ageing and universal inclusion. She defined assistive technology as both low- and high-tech products and systems and services required to provide them. Ms. Shae stressed that assistive technology was a universal need, required by 2.5 billion people globally and two-thirds of all persons over 60 and that it was fundamental to healthy ageing and an investment in human capital. Assistive technology supported inclusive development by allowing people to stay active and healthy for longer, thereby easing strains on health and social care systems. A persistent challenge was the deep inequalities in access: as few as 3 to 10 per cent of people in LICs had access to assistive technology, compared to 90 per cent in HICs. Key barriers included lack of awareness, insufficient services, lack of workforce competency, and lack of acceptability to users, often because older persons were not included in the design process. Ms. Shae explained that digital health (telemedicine, online training, and digital screening) could help bridge these gaps. Priority measures included: 1) integrating assistive technology into universal health coverage as a necessity, not a luxury; 2) investing in digital health infrastructure; and 3) fostering global collaboration. She announced a forthcoming global roadmap on accelerating access to assistive technology to be published by WHO in collaboration with UNICEF and UN DESA.

Carla Taramasco, Professor at Universidad Andrés Bello and Director of the Institute of Technological Research for Health and Well-being in Chile, presented on supporting older adults to live independently at home using technology with purpose. She began by stating that the objective was not just to live longer, but to live better —turning longevity into an opportunity for fulfillment. Examples of opportunities offered by technology included using AI and predictive analytics on underutilized health data to anticipate frailty and shift from reactive to preventive care. The home could be transformed into a primary site for care through passive sensors that translated daily activities into actionable clinical metrics. These advances came with significant challenges, including the need to protect digital rights, privacy, and data security, as well as overcoming the digital literacy gap among older adults. Ms. Taramasco shared Chile's decade-long experience in developing an ecosystem to support living at home. This system combined smart home passive sensors to monitor activity, falls, and environmental factors; games to stimulate cognitive and motor functions; and an expanded clinical record that integrated home, behavioral, and health data for professional decision support. She concluded with a call for global cooperation and emphasized that solutions must be designed in partnership with older people, rather than simply for them, to ensure real adoption and impact.

Andrew Aitken, Economist, Directorate of Employment, Labour and Social Affairs, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), focused on enhancing employment opportunities as populations aged. Shrinking working-age populations (projected to decline by 8 per cent by 2060 in the OECD countries) necessitated new strategies for employment in later life. Mr. Aitken outlined a three-pronged agenda. The first pillar involved rewarding work and later retirement through higher pension ages and flexible retirement options. The second pillar addressed demand-side barriers by encouraging employers to hire and retain older workers. This meant tackling age discrimination using anti-bias strategies and supporting career mobility. The third pillar was to improve the employability of older workers via a lifecycle approach. Older workers scored lower in digital skills and received far less training than younger workers. Mr. Aitken called for policies such as individual learning accounts to address training barriers, alongside proactive occupational health programs and phased return-to-work options to improve job quality and health. He concluded that mobilizing the underused labor potential of older workers required policies that closed the gender gap, supported longer and healthier working lives and tackled age discrimination.

Participants raised questions about gender differences, access issues, and economic implications of technology for older populations. Innovation had improved health and independence, but older women remain disproportionately excluded. Ms. Shae stated that in many low-resource settings, older women were frequently the last to receive assistive products within a household, as limited resources were prioritized for younger or male family members. She remarked that assistive technology must be affordable, integrated into primary health care, and covered by insurance or national health schemes to avoid deepening inequities. Ms. Taramasco agreed that gender remains a cross-cutting concern, noting that her team continues to explore how digital health programs can better include women, especially those living alone or with limited resources. She underscored that co-designing technologies with older users helped to address gender and cultural barriers that affected access and use. Mr. Aitken highlighted persistent gender gaps in employment and training. Women, especially those with caregiving responsibilities, faced structural disadvantages in accessing reskilling and digital learning opportunities, resulting in lower digital literacy and reduced participation in later-life employment. Mr. Aitken also cited OECD evidence demonstrating that automation affected older workers, women, and immigrants more severely, and called for targeted training programs that recognized the skills and competencies older workers already possessed. He added that extending working life did not necessarily mean less time in retirement, as life expectancy continued to increase.

Participants also inquired about the economic and fiscal effects of automation, including whether companies that replaced human labour with machines should contribute taxes toward pensions and social services. Mr. Aitken stated that automation and digitalization were transforming income distribution and might erode traditional tax bases, underscoring the need to rethink labour market and social protection systems. He suggested that governments explore new approaches to sustain pension financing and strengthen safety nets as technological change accelerates.

Responding to questions about Chile's "ageing in place" initiative, Ms. Taramasco explained that despite expanding coverage, scale-up depended heavily on resources and coordination across health and research institutions and local governments. The main obstacles remained cost, interoperability of systems, and the ethical management of personal data.

Several participants noted that ageing was not solely a concern for high-income countries and that many older adults in low- and middle-income settings worked in informal or agricultural labour with limited access to technology, social protection, or training.

Ms. Shae cautioned that when markets were the primary regulatory force, technological advances could reinforce inequality. While high-income countries are investing in smart homes and robotic care, many communities still lacked access to basic low-tech assistive devices or reliable Internet connections. Participants observed that cost-effective studies were required to prioritize affordable solutions that could reach marginalized groups.

Participants stated that integrating technology in informal labor markets required attention to education, financing, and cultural acceptance and that community structures and family networks continued to play a central role in care, especially where formal services were limited, and that technology must complement, not replace, these systems.

The discussion also analyzed ethical and governance issues. Participants agreed that stronger global frameworks were needed to protect data privacy, support algorithmic transparency, and promote people-centred approaches grounded in human rights. Ms. Taramasco recommended ethical standards and international cooperation on data governance, encouraging countries to invest in digital innovation while safeguarding the participation of vulnerable populations in the design and use of new technologies.

Ms. Shae recommended closing the global assistive technology gap through better financing mechanisms, such as insurance coverage and market-shaping strategies to reduce costs of essential devices like hearing aids. She emphasized that primary health care systems could play a crucial role in expanding access by integrating digital health tools and training local providers.

Mr. Aitken added that policy design should be participatory, involving unions, employers, and workers to achieve fairness and public trust. He explained that as automation and digitalization reshaped labor markets, countries must adopt flexible, inclusive policies that adapt to demographic and cultural differences while maintaining social fairness.

Ms. Henning summarized the key themes that had emerged across the discussion: gender equity, affordability, access for informal workers, and the need for ethical, rights-based approaches to innovation. She conveyed that bridging the digital divide would require coordinated policies that strengthen education, social inclusion, and intergenerational dialog.

Delivering final remarks on behalf of the Population Division, Ms. Sawyer observed that the discussions had reinforced the need for collaboration across sectors, including health, labor, and social policy. While technology held great promise, it must be guided by equity, ethics, and respect for human rights. Inclusive access to assistive and digital innovations was essential for realizing the ICPD vision of dignity and well-being for all people throughout the life course.

D. Session IV: Overcoming digital divides: ensuring inclusive and safe access to technologies (30 October 2025)

Ms. Sawyer opened the meeting on behalf of the Director of the Population Division. She noted that the session would build on the earlier consultations in the series that had addressed innovations in population data, technologies supporting sexual and reproductive health, and the use of technology for healthy ageing, bringing these strands together through a focus on closing digital divides and promoting inclusive, safe access to technology.

Grace Puliyel, Senior Population Affairs Officer, Population Division, placed the discussion within the context of the ICPD Programme of Action and other global frameworks. She noted that despite some progress in gender equality in recent years, major divides also persisted across age, income, geography and disability—leaving older persons, rural populations and persons with disabilities least connected.

Intersectional inequalities further compounded exclusion. While the Programme of Action did not explicitly address digital divides, its focus on equity, access and ethical technology use remained deeply relevant. She highlighted frameworks such as the 2030 Agenda, the Pact for the Future, the Declaration on Future Generations and the Global Digital Compact, which affirmed digital access as a public good and human right. She concluded that futureproofing the ICPD agenda required the promotion of digital inclusion, equitable digital infrastructure, affordability, lifelong digital literacy, and strong governance to uphold safety and human rights.

Alexandra Robinson, Gender-Based Violence Technical Advisor at UNFPA, stressed that digital inclusion could not exist without digital safety. She cautioned against the escalating threat of technology-facilitated gender-based violence, noting that women were twenty-seven times more likely than men to face online harm and that ninety-eight per cent of explicit deepfake material targets women and girls. Ms. Robinson outlined risks across three areas —design, deployment and business models— explaining how unsafe design and profit-driven systems perpetuated harm and exclusion. Data breaches and surveillance reduced trust, leading to increased marginalization for vulnerable communities. She advocated for safety, security and privacy by design, greater community participation, stronger rights-based regulation and data protection, and efforts to challenge harmful gender and social norms that sustained online violence.

The panel discussion, moderated by Jenny Arana, Programme Officer for Digital Inclusion at the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), examined strategies for overcoming digital divides and promoting equitable, secure technological access.

Alexandre Costa Barbosa, Digital Policy Consultant and Researcher, presented trends in connectivity, pointing out that Internet access alone did not guarantee inclusion unless accompanied by universality, affordability, reliability, quality, digital literacy and the regulations to support them. Drawing on Brazil's experience, he stated that while approximately 85 per cent of the population reported Internet access, only 22 per cent enjoyed meaningful connectivity. He stressed the significance of supporting community networks and small local Internet service providers that expanded access in underserved areas, and to develop policies that enable them to work together with the big telecom networks. He highlighted the concept of "epistemic sovereignty", whereby marginalized communities developed and governed digital solutions that reflected their own needs and contexts. He emphasized the need to develop digital technologies that people can use, including the use of open-source software.

Fengchun Miao, Chief of the Unit for Information and Communication Technologies and Education at UNESCO, discussed the opportunities and risks of artificial intelligence (AI) in education. Mr. Miao cautioned that the emerging AI divide, driven by unequal access to core infrastructure (supercomputing, AI chips, data centres), electricity and AI expertise, risked deepening existing digital divides. Factors compounding the digital divide included unequal Internet penetration, digital security, digital literacy, affordability and funding. Mr. Miao warned that unchecked AI integration in schools could undermine teacher agency, student agency and creativity, and cultural diversity. He proposed building inclusive, regulated and rights-based AI systems that would be safe and contextually relevant. He recommended developing competency frameworks for teachers and students, creating validation mechanisms for educational AI tools, and guaranteeing that education remained a human-centred process rather than one driven solely by machines.

Ivana Bartoletti, Global Chief of Privacy and AI Governance Officer at Wipro, noted that digital technology was a force for good when properly governed. However, for many of the estimated 5.3 billion people connected to the Internet —particularly for women, children and marginalized groups— connectivity had brought exposure, not empowerment. She emphasized that access without safety did not constitute inclusion; rather, it distributed risks, harming those most in need of access. Without governance, digital technology replicated and magnified inequality. She identified three critical governance gaps — the inclusion gap, accountability gap, and speed gap. She explained that policies were often written without involving those most affected and digital tools were often designed for small population groups. In addition, regulations became outdated quickly because technology evolved faster than governance. Ms. Bartoletti observed that current policy and regulatory frameworks often failed to protect marginalized groups from digital harms such as deepfake exploitation, data misuse and unsafe AI companions. Ms. Bartoletti advocated for participatory, multi-layered and adaptive governance systems grounded in human rights, involving women, youth and marginalized communities from the design stage. She called for stronger corporate accountability built into business models, pre-market controls and government audits before product release, commitment to inclusive policy processes, investment in AI safety research, criminalization of technology-facilitated gender-based violence, and policies that embedded safety by design while fostering innovation to advance dignity, equity and trust in the digital age.

Following the panel presentations, several attendees raised questions related to equitable access to technology, governance, and digital safety in the age of AI. Panellists emphasized that AI was not merely a technical issue but one deeply rooted in global political systems, economic dependencies, and infrastructures. Panellists also highlighted the concentration of power among a few major technology firms and discussed the need for inclusive models such as data cooperatives and locally driven digital public goods to ensure fairer distribution of digital dividends. Suggestions included state-led outsourcing, taxation on data extraction from low-income countries, and support for youth-led innovation to promote more equitable AI ecosystems.

Questions also addressed the growing challenges of misinformation, manipulation, and the rapid spread of fake news, especially among children. Structuring digital transformation and AI in age-appropriate ways was complex but essential. While AI offered valuable tools for education and support, particularly for children with learning disabilities, precedence needed to be given to safety over speed in product deployment. Panellists called for improved digital literacy, mandatory child impact assessments, strict regulatory accountability for companies, and better enforcement of existing human rights frameworks rather than relying solely on new legislation. They also noted that appropriateness should go beyond age to include users' abilities, cultural and linguistic relevance, and equitable digital access, especially in low-resource settings.

In response to a question on key policy measures for fostering a safe, inclusive, and rights-based digital future, panellists agreed that there was no one-size-fits-all approach and that localized implementation was essential to achieve meaningful progress toward the SDGs. Furthermore, it was crucial to experiment with innovative tools within regulated safe spaces and strengthened governance mechanisms to guarantee privacy and accountability. Moreover, panellists pointed out the need to bridge basic and advanced technology. Mr. Miao specifically underscored the importance of investing in AI competencies to empower citizens to understand and engage with emerging technologies, while ensuring that AI development does not divert essential resources from foundational education and infrastructure, especially for marginalized groups.

Ms. Arana concluded the discussion by emphasizing that bridging digital divides required not only access but also empowerment, safety, and inclusion. She reinforced the importance of translating meaningful connectivity into real capabilities for all, particularly for vulnerable groups, adopting human-centred, rights-based approaches to technology, and advancing cross-sectoral, forward-looking policies to ensure that no one is left behind in the digital future.

Stephen Kisambira, Population Affairs Officer in the Population Division, thanked all attendees for their valuable contributions and insightful reflections. He noted that the discussion had underscored the shared commitment to harness technology for sustainable development while upholding human dignity and equity. He reiterated that the Population Division and UNFPA would integrate the key points raised during the expert consultation series into the reports of the Secretary-General to the upcoming CPD.

21- 30 October 2025

UNITED NATIONS EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON POPULATION, TECHNOLOGY AND RESEARCH IN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Population Division
Department of Economic and Social Affairs
United Nations Secretariat
New York

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

Day 1: Tuesday, 21 October 2025
EDT (New York time)

8:00 – 10:00 am

Session I. Population data innovations: collection, analysis and use

Opening remarks

- John Wilmoth, Population Division, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
- Cheryl Sawyer, Population Division/DESA
- Sathya Doraiswamy, UNFPA

- **Moderator**: Francesca Grum, Statistics Division/DESA

- Federico Segui, Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE), Uruguay
  Technological advancements in census or administrative data.
- Andy Tatem, Director, World Pop
  Geospatial data for policy and planning.
- Sibusiso Mkwananzi, Commissioner, National Planning Commission South Africa and Demographer and Senior Researcher, Wits RHI University of the Witwatersrand
  Leveraging data science and machine learning for urban climate adaptation.

Q&A

Day 2: Thursday, 23 October 2025
EDT (New York time)

8:00 – 10:00 am **Session II. Technology and research in sexual and reproductive health**

Opening remarks

- Cheryl Sawyer, Population Division/DESA
- Siqi Wu, Population Division/DESA
- Willibald Zeck, UNFPA

- **Moderator**: Danielle Engel, UNFPA

- Lisa Haddad. Population Council
  Contraceptive technologies: Looking ahead to new approaches to increase options for family planning.
- Gitau Mburu, World Health Organization
  Infertility research and technologies advances.
- Onikepe Owolabi, Guttmacher Institute
  Advances in the research on sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Q&A

Day 3: Tuesday, 28 October 2025
EDT (New York time)

8:00 – 10:00 am **Session III. Ageing populations: technological advances for lengthening healthy, independent and active lifespans**

Opening remarks

- Cheryl Sawyer, Population Division/DESA
- Yumiko Kamiya, Population Division/DESA
- Michael Herrmann, UNFPA

- **Moderator**: Sabine Henning, United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

- Kylie Shae, World Health Organization
  Levering assistive technology and digital health for healthy ageing and universal inclusion.

- Carla Taramasco, Universidad Andrés Bello, Chile
  Independent living.

- Andrew Aitken, OECD
  Enhancing opportunities for continued employment.

Q&A

Day 4: Thursday, 30 October
EDT (New York time)

8:00 – 10:00 am **Session IV. Overcoming digital divides: ensuring inclusive and safe access to technologies**

Opening remarks

- Cheryl Sawyer, Population Division/DESA
- Grace Puliyel, Population Division/DESA
- Alexandra Robinson, UNFPA

- **Moderator**: Jeny Arana, International Telecommunication Union

- Alexandre Costa Barbosa,
  Digital policy consultant and researcher, *Digital access/divides and impacts on inclusion, especially for women, youth, older persons, disadvantaged groups*.
- Fengchun Miao, UNESCO

Technologies in education and employment.

- Ivana Bartoletti, Wipro

Online safety and governance.

Q&A

ANNEX 2: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

21–30 October 2025

UNITED NATIONS EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON POPULATION, TECHNOLOGY AND RESEARCH IN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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