



CONCEPT NOTE

Introduction and objectives

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”. As part of the substantive preparations for the annual session, the Population Division of UN DESA will convene a series of expert consultations during October 2025 to discuss selected aspects of the special theme. The consultations will bring together experts from various sectors and regions to review key developments and evidence most critical to bring to the attention of the Commission, in order to inform the preparation of the report of the Secretary-General on the special theme.

Background

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.

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 to be prepared by the Population Division will focus on selected aspects that intersect with demographic trends and where normative guidance of the CPD is particularly salient, for example, advances in population data, new technologies for contraception or assisted reproduction, technology that advances overall and healthy life spans, and technology trends with relevance to international migration. The report will both highlight evidence on the impact of technological change and take a forward-looking view of advancements on the horizon.

Mandate

The mandate of the Commission on Population and Development is to monitor, review and assess the implementation of the Programme of Action of the ICPD. Within that mandate, the Commission contributes also to the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, taking into account the integrated nature of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their interlinkages. Each year, the Commission aims to adopt a resolution on the special theme of its annual session.

The present series of expert consultations is organized to support the preparation of the report of the Secretary-General on the theme and, more broadly, to inform the Commission's deliberations.

Topics for consultations

The consultations will be organized in 4 virtual meetings over the course of 2 weeks. Crosscutting elements of gender and human rights are to be mainstreamed within each session. Specific presentation topics are indicative and subject to change pending confirmation of speakers.

1. Tuesday 21 October, 8:00-10:00am EDT: Population data innovations: collection, analysis and use
 - *Technological advancements in census or administrative data*
 - *Geospatial data for policy and planning*
 - *Applications of big data or artificial intelligence in population research*

2. Thursday 23 October, 8:00-10:00am EDT: Technology and research in sexual, reproductive, maternal or child health
 - *Infertility research and technology advances*
 - *New developments in contraceptive technologies*
 - *Advances in research in maternal and child health*
3. Tuesday 28 October, 8:00-10:00am EDT: Ageing populations: technological advances for lengthening healthy, independent and active lifespans
 - *Health technologies delaying disease or disability*
 - *Independent living (ageing in place)*
 - *Enhancing opportunities for continued employment*
4. Thursday 30 October, 8:00-10:00am EDT: Overcoming digital divides: ensuring inclusive and safe access to technologies
 - *Digital access/divides and impacts on inclusion, especially for women, youth, older persons, disadvantaged groups*
 - *Technologies in education and employment*
 - *Online safety*

Format of the meetings

The meetings will be two hours and held virtually on the MS-Teams platform. To accommodate participants from a range of time zones, the sessions will be held during the morning (New York time).

Each meeting will include:

- A chair from DESA/Population Division
- A moderator and/or discussant from the UN system
- 3 invited experts from academia, Governments, UN system, NGOs or private sector

The Population Division will make a brief opening intervention. The moderator will introduce panelists, who will be invited to make a 10 minute presentation (with or without slides). The moderator will then facilitate a discussion session, with the goal to identify a) the most important evidence on the benefits or challenges of given technologies for advancing the ICPD agenda and its contribution to the SDGs and future development agendas, to be communicated in the reports of the Secretary-General and b) priority policy recommendations for Governments to consider in their deliberations at the 59th session.

Outcome of the meetings

The expert consultations are expected to provide substantive inputs and advice to help guide the preparation of the reports of the Secretary-General on the special theme of the 59th session, including recommendations for key messages. The Population Division will prepare brief summaries of each consultation, summarizing the deliberations and recommendations. With the permission of participants, the presentations will be posted on the website of the consultations.