

# **PORTUGAL**

**UNITED NATIONS**

**Commission of Population and Development**

**Forty-first Session**

**Item 4: General debate on National Experience in Population Matters:  
Population distribution, urbanization, internal migration and development**

**Statement by**

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Mr. Chairman

First of all, let me congratulate you on your election as chairman of the meeting.

My distinguished colleague from Slovenia, speaking on behalf of the European Union, has already expressed the main ideas on this year's theme ("Population distribution, urbanization, internal migration and development") which we fully endorse.

I would like to reaffirm our support for the entire agenda of the International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo, in 1994 and the key actions adopted at the ICPD + 5, approved in 1999, including the MDG's and other internationally agreed development goals.

We all know by the world's demographic scales that for the first time in history, more than half the world's population will live in cities. This urban explosion, a combination of rapid urbanization and high rates of natural population growth that affects both rural and urban areas, poses many social and economic challenges to many governments, including for migration management and regional integration.

My country, like many countries in Europe, has experienced the increase of urbanization throughout the XX and early XXI century, leading to the development of two major urban zones, Lisbon and Oporto, each with more than 1.5 million inhabitants. In terms of urbanization the 2001 census showed that over half of the Portuguese population lived in places with 2.000 or more inhabitants.

Population distribution has been a cause of concern for the Portuguese Government. Over the last decades, we have been witnessing, on the one hand, huge population growth along the coast, mainly in suburban areas, combined, on the other hand, with the population decline in rural areas, or countryside, especially along the Portuguese border and mountainous regions. A very specific situation pertains to the depopulation phenomenon in central Lisbon and Oporto, but also in some suburbs of their respective metropolitan regions.

The region of Lisbon has both the highest density of rural migrants and the highest absolute number of foreign residents. Nevertheless a significant number of recent immigrants, particularly from Eastern Europe,

have moved to rural areas, which has subsequently contributed to mitigate the depopulation effect in those regions.

Simultaneously, two positive trends in the population dynamics issue were registered in the Portuguese territory.

The first refers to the positive migratory growth, which contributes to:

- (I) slow down the population decline in considerable large areas in the country's rural regions;
- (II) development of medium countryside cities.

The second trend has to do with the natural increase rate, which plays an important role in the population growth in some areas of the north and south coast.

Our cities, like many other cities all over the world, have become multicultural centers, requiring the inclusion of intercultural perspectives in urban planning and in managing urbanization. We all know that unfortunately the urban poor often have little choice but to take shelter in ramshackle structures constructed in the most polluted, dangerous or marginalized areas in segregated neighbourhoods with little access to employment opportunities, childcare and education.

At the national level, and in this respect, coordination among the local administration and ministries, such as the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Work and Social Security is of vital importance.

Mr. Chairman

- In this context, housing is considered by the Portuguese Government to be a crucial aspect of integration, as it may strengthen the sense of security and stability of the urban poor, as well as have an influence on the development and maintenance of social connections and interactions.
- In 1993, a re-housing programme (PER) was initiated to address the proliferation of illegal housing in vicinities of Portuguese cities, with the main purpose of eliminating slums from districts. Since 2004, a new program was implemented – the “PROHABITA” – which can be applied in cases of irregular registration of the families, also allowing those whose houses were destroyed by storms or any other natural disaster, and who

can't afford to pay the reconstruction, to apply for government funds created for that purpose.

- The Portuguese Government *Plan for Immigrant Integration* foresees the opening up and development of a social housing market by the local authorities with the partnership of sectorial associations, charitable organisations, NGO's and housing cooperatives, stimulating the housing market in the central areas of the metropolitan regions. Another objective is to retain and even attract young adults to those areas and therefore decrease the depopulation risk and the degradation of urban heritage.
- Improving the urban and rural environments and the lives of people, especially the youth is vital. The first necessary step in the political agenda on human resources qualification is supported by education policies and training and is geared towards bridging the gap between the under-qualified and skilled population in order to maintain the sustainability of the technological, scientific and innovation development plan of the country. Suppressing this gap, however, will depend on the efficient response to two strategic objectives: strengthening the national education effort and training of the younger generation, thereby fighting early school drop out.
- The progression of poverty and social exclusion are undeniably linked to unemployment and unstable labour markets. In order to reduce the unemployment rates and as a development policy, new employment strategies were recently applied.
- The Portuguese Government has introduced the "PARES" program (the social equipments enlargement program). Some of the main goals are to support young couples and their children through a 50% increase in nursery vacancies and to make possible for older persons to stay in their homes with the best quality of life and autonomy that can be provided. In the cases of those who are dependant, the government will improve the number of vacancies in the residences for the elderly. In addition, there are a number of childbirth incentives being undertaken by municipalities from depopulated areas. The government has also taken supplementary measures in this regard.
- The National Health Plan is a major landmark as a guide for public action aimed at obtaining health gains for the population. The National Health Plan covers the period 2004-2010, and implementation is currently under way. Primary care was also subject to a major change, with the ongoing implementation of family health units – multidisciplinary teams formed voluntarily – aimed at providing better care to the population.

Finally, the National Action Plan of territorial and urban planning oriented to 2025 has the following strategic goals:

1. to preserve and add value to biodiversity, natural resources, landscape and cultural heritage, use energy and geologic resources in a sustainable way and, control, prevent and minimize the risks;
2. to reinforce the Portuguese territorial competitiveness and its integration in the Iberian, European, Atlantic and global areas;
3. to promote a polycentric territorial development and reinforce the infrastructures in order to support integration and social cohesion;
4. to ensure territorial equity when providing infrastructures and collective equipments and its universal access;
5. to expand advanced information and communication networks and promote its usage among the population, enterprises and public sector;
6. to reinforce the quality and efficiency of territorial management, promoting an informed, active and responsible participation of the citizens and institutions.

Mr. Chairman

Let me now turn to other population-related matters that are also of concern to my country:

Nationally, the impact of urbanization in Portugal is visible in the country's fertility rates. Portugal is in fact a low fertility country (with an average of 1.4 children per woman), despite the positive effect of a higher fertility rate on the part of immigrant residents (2.4. children per woman).

Regarding broader issues, reproductive health and causes of infertility, should be maintained on the international agenda of population and development as well as fighting sexually transmitted diseases, in particular HIV/AIDS.

We also believe it is important to continue the worldwide efforts to enable all persons to make informed choices about their reproductive life, family, and maternal health.

Mr. Chairman

To conclude, the urban explosion, a combination of rapid urbanization and high rates of natural population growth in some parts of the world pose many social and economic challenges to governments, including for migration management and regional integration.

While urbanization is an integral part of economic and social development in both developed and developing countries, it can have adverse consequences for migrating and urban populations by straining the existing urban infra-structures and services, resulting in higher rates of urban poverty, lack of access to health care, education and other services, like water supply and sanitation, as well as environmental degradation.

It is our duty to avoid these scenarios and to take full advantage of the opportunities and benefits of urbanization, in social economic and environmental issues.

This is the challenge we are all faced with.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman