

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

COMMISSION ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT
FORTY-EIGHTH SESSION

INTEGRATING POPULATION ISSUES INTO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING IN THE
POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA
E/CN.9/2015/3

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

MR. BARNEY COHEN
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
POPULATION DIVISION/DESA

New York, 13 April 2015

Madame Chairperson,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to introduce the report of the Secretary-General entitled “Integrating Population Issues into Sustainable Development, Including in the Post-2015 Development Agenda” (E/CN.9/2014/3).

As we are all aware, 2015 will be remembered as an historic year in the history of the United Nations. It marks the end of a fifteen-year effort by Member States to work collectively towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals. And five months from now, after Member States meet here in New York in September, the world will have a new global development agenda, which will guide the international community’s efforts over the next fifteen years to eradicate poverty, reverse global trends towards unsustainable patterns of consumption and production, and better protect and manage the environment.

The MDGs have taught us a great deal. By setting a discrete set of measurable and time-bound global goals and targets, the MDGs established priorities, increased political accountability, raised public pressure, and strengthened metrics to achieve positive results.

But, none of those things would have been possible without a sound understanding of the changing demography of the world at the international, regional, and national level.

So in designing the new development agenda, it is important for policymakers to understand and account for the nature and extent of major demographic changes that are likely to

unfold over the next fifteen years and how these changes can be expected to contribute to, or hinder, the achievement of the new goals and targets.

The new report of the Secretary-General combines the latest available demographic data on current population estimates with the latest population projections produced by the United Nations' Population Division, to clarify how the world is changing, both absolutely and relative to the experience of the previous fifteen years.

Distinguished delegates, allow me to highlight some of the main findings in the report.

The world's population is projected to grow from 7.3 billion in 2015 to 8.4 billion in 2030, roughly equivalent to adding approximately 73 million people every year. Put differently, by 2030, the global economy will need to support a population that is approximately 15 percent larger than it is today.

The story of global demographic change is, however, not simply a story about continued population increase. As the report points out, the world is characterized by considerable demographic diversity, both with respect to the size and the structure of different countries' populations and with respect to the changes that are projected to occur over the next 15 years. The population of some countries will grow rapidly. While the population of others will remain more or less the same or even decline.

Globally, however, 2 billion babies will be born over the next 15 years and if the world is to achieve the new sustainable development goals and leave no-one behind, then every one of those newborns as well as their mothers should have access to high-quality health services throughout all phases of life. In addition, all children should be able to attend school and no child should have to grow up malnourished or living in extreme poverty.

More births over the next 15 years, compared with the previous 15 years, therefore, will pose new challenges, particularly for regions where existing rates of poverty and malnutrition, as well as rates of infant and child mortality are high and levels of education are low. In this regard, Africa stands out as a region of particular concern, with several countries projected to have 30 percent or more births over the next 15 years compared to the past 15 years – which will make it very hard for governments in those countries to meet the new sustainable development goals and targets. Indeed, many countries will face numerous challenges simply maintaining current levels of health coverage and school enrolment.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Over the next fifteen years the world will also need to prepare for 1.9 billion young people who will turn 15, a 7 percent increase at the global level over the previous 15 year period. Young people can be an important vehicle for economic development and social change, provided that they can get the right start in life. The new report underscores the importance of greater investment in secondary and tertiary education, youth-friendly health services, and the need to create opportunities for young people in the labour market, particularly now while the global youth unemployment rate continues to remain above 2007 levels.

Similarly, population projections suggest that the number of women of reproductive age will increase globally by 9 percent and in Africa by 45 percent over the next 15 years. Advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women, ensuring young women have access to education, ensuring women have a say in the political process, and critically ensuring that women have the knowledge and tools to decide on the number and timing of their children are really the cornerstones of much of the population and development –related agenda. So an increase in the number of women of reproductive age will have important implications for the achievement of certain new SDGs, particularly in countries where fertility remains high.

Equally significantly, the new report points to the fact that we need to prepare for a world that will be significantly older than it is today. Older persons, i.e. persons aged 60 or over, are now the world's fastest growing population age group and further population ageing is inevitable as people live longer and choose to have fewer children.

While the population ageing process is most advanced in countries of Europe and North America, where 1 of every 5 people is already aged 60 or over, over the next 15 years rapid growth in the number of older persons is expected to occur across all major income groups and areas of the world, raising concerns about the well-being of older persons with regard to their economic security in old age, their access to high-quality health care, their level of informal and formal social support networks and the protection of their rights.

Madame Chairperson,

The new development agenda will also have to take into account the fact all of the 1.1 billion increase in global population over the next 15 years is expected to occur in urban, not rural, areas. Cities are already home to more than half of the world's population, and all regions, with the exception of Europe, are projected to record increases in the size of their urban populations of at least 15 per cent over the next 15 years.

Cities have always been focal points for economic activity, innovation, and employment. High population density may also be good for minimizing the effect of man on local ecosystems, as higher population density typically implies a lower per capita cost for providing infrastructure and basic services. The challenge, however, is that as cities grow, managing them becomes increasingly complex. And in many cities, unplanned or inadequately managed urban expansion has led to urban sprawl, pollution, environmental degradation and in some cases, heightened exposure to the risk of natural hazards. Greater attention to strengthening urban governance will therefore be essential.

Policymakers should also prepare for higher levels of international migration over the next 15 years as the global economy continues to become more integrated than ever before. Future international migration may also be affected by climate change, with people with the fewest resources most at risk and vulnerable. Migration can be a positive transformative force, lifting people out of poverty and benefiting both countries of origin and destination. However, respecting and promoting the rights of migrants and reducing the costs of migration are essential

to ensure the well-being of migrants and that migration as a demographic phenomenon meets its full development potential.

Finally, Madame Chairperson,

Over twenty years ago, in 1994, the International Conference on Population and Development's Programme of Action pointed out that unsustainable consumption and production patterns were contributing to the unsustainable use of natural resources and environmental degradation as well as to the reinforcement of social inequities and of poverty. In designing a new post-2015 development agenda, Member States need to ensure that efforts to improve the quality of life of the present generation are far-reaching, broad, and inclusive but do not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Accomplishing these ambitious goals will depend on identifying strategies to expand access to resources for the poorest people while at the same time reducing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production by others in order to safeguard the environment.

This suggests that issues such as energy use and energy efficiency are likely to attract more attention than ever before. Continued population growth combined with rising standards of living suggests that energy use and carbon dioxide emissions will be much higher in the future, unless there is concerted action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Consequently greater investment in cleaner energy infrastructure that utilizes high efficiency and clean fossil-fuel technologies or that use new technologies that take advantage of alternative energy sources are clearly needed.

In the long-run, the attenuation of global population growth in a human-rights framework by meeting the voluntary family planning needs of women can make a significant contribution by leading ultimately to lower levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. But the technological choices that we make, the use of clean energy sources, the extent that we reduce waste, and our ability to utilize greater energy efficient technologies, are all equally critical. And in this regard, it is not so much the number of people, but what they produce, what they consume, and what they waste...

Thank you, Madame Chairperson.