

**UNITED NATIONS EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON  
SUSTAINABLE CITIES, HUMAN MOBILITY  
AND INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION**

Population Division  
Department of Economic and Social Affairs  
United Nations Secretariat  
New York  
7-8 September 2017

**CONCEPT NOTE**

**Introduction**

Urbanization and migration are profoundly important demographic phenomena affecting population growth and decline, and the spatial distribution of populations both within and between countries. The two processes have significant development impacts at the global, regional, national and subnational levels, and are closely interconnected. Cities are centres of demographic, social, economic and political change, and magnets for migrants from near and far.

Recognizing the importance of these topics, the Commission on Population and Development decided that the thematic focus of its fifty-first session in April 2018 will be on “Sustainable cities, human mobility and international migration”. The Population Division is organizing an expert group meeting on this topic, to be held in New York from 7 to 8 September 2017.

**Global trends in urbanization and migration**

The world is becoming increasingly urban. In 2016, an estimated 54.5 per cent of the world’s population lived in urban settlements, up from 43 per cent in 1990. By 2030, urban areas are projected to host 60 per cent of the global population, and one in every three persons will live in cities with half a million inhabitants or more.

At the same time, the past 20 years have seen major changes in the size, direction and complexity of migratory flows both within and between countries. Driven by economic, demographic, social and political disparities, population mobility has continued to increase. As a result, the number of settled migrants worldwide has continued to grow. Globally, the number of international migrants — persons living in a country other than where they were born — grew from 173 million in 2000 to 244 million in 2015. The number of internal migrants is even larger — one study estimated that in 2005, 763 million people were living within the country but outside the region of their birth. Indeed, most migrants move within their own countries rather than across international borders.

The phenomena of urbanization and migration are interconnected, especially since migrants tend to gravitate toward cities. These movements contribute to the fact that almost all of the growth in the world's population over the next few decades is expected to take place in urban areas. For the developing regions, continued migration to urban centres or to countries, and often cities, in the more developed regions is expected. The interplay between migration and urbanization poses both challenges and opportunities for the migrants, communities, cities and governments concerned.

### **Relevance for debates on global development at the United Nations**

The Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) devoted chapter IX to "Population distribution, urbanization and internal migration" and chapter X to "International Migration". Both chapters address the challenges and opportunities of people on the move and emphasize that governments should formulate policies to promote "in an integrated manner the equitable and ecologically sustainable development of major sending and receiving areas, with particular emphasis on the promotion of economic, social and gender equity based on respect for human rights"<sup>1</sup>.

Urbanization and migration also figure prominently in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including in Goal 11 on sustainable cities. International migration and human mobility are linked to various parts of the 2030 Agenda, especially target 10.7, "Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies".

The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, adopted by the General Assembly in September 2016, launched a process of intergovernmental negotiations that should lead to the adoption of a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration at an intergovernmental conference to be held in 2018.

Meanwhile, the New Urban Agenda, adopted at the Habitat III Conference in October 2016, recognized urbanization as one of the twenty-first century's most transformative trends, posing massive sustainability challenges in terms of housing, infrastructure, basic services, food security, health, education, decent jobs, safety and natural resources, among others.

### **Objectives of the meeting**

The purpose of the expert group meeting is to examine new evidence and analyses regarding trends in urbanization and migration, including their drivers. The discussion will focus on development impacts, including social, economic, political and environmental aspects, and on implications for policy, governance and planning.

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<sup>1</sup> ICPD Programme of Action, Chapter IX, 9.2.

Regarding policy implications, the focus will range from the global to the local level, with the goal of identifying substantive connections across levels and encouraging coordinated policy responses based on a whole-of-government approach. The experts will also explore the significance of migration, urbanization and cities for the follow-up to the relevant pillars of the global development agenda — ICPD Programme of Action, 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, New Urban Agenda.

Recognizing that people are at the centre of sustainable development, the emphasis will be on internal and international migrants, especially those moving to or from cities of all sizes, and on the impacts of population distribution, mobility and connectedness on sustainable development. The discussion of these topics should be finely nuanced, considering geographic and gender differences as well as the situation of youth and populations at risk of being left behind.

### **Background notes**

The Population Division will set the stage for the meeting by making a presentation on global trends in migration and urbanization. Invited speakers will provide brief background notes (approximately five pages) for distribution to other participants. Each background note should address a specific agenda item and include a summary of the expert’s own research and evidence from other sources, as well as references to relevant parts of the ICPD Programme of Action, the 2030 Agenda, the New York Declaration and the New Urban Agenda.

All background notes should be submitted to the Population Division by 1 September 2017 so that they can be distributed and reviewed by other participants prior to the meeting. Speakers are requested to make presentations at the meeting that are linked closely to their background notes. Presenters are encouraged to prepare PowerPoint presentations and to share them in advance with the organizers, if possible.

### **Outcome of the meeting**

The Population Division will prepare a report summarizing the discussions and key conclusions of the meeting. With participants’ permission, the background notes and presentations will be posted on the Population Division’s website.

The meeting is expected to provide substantive input for the preparation of the report of the Secretary-General on the special theme of the fifty-first session of the Commission on Population and Development, “Sustainable cities, human mobility and international migration”. During the lunch break on 8 September, a briefing for Member States will focus on the policy implications of the discussions at the meeting.