

**COMMISSION ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT  
FORTY-NINTH SESSION**

**STRENGTHENING THE DEMOGRAPHIC EVIDENCE BASE FOR  
THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

**E/CN.9/2016/3**

**REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**Madame Chairperson,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and gentleman,**

It is my pleasure to introduce the report of the Secretary-General entitled “Strengthening the demographic evidence base for the post-2015 development agenda” (E/CN.9/2016/3).

This report reviews the major sources of demographic data and addresses the issues of data harmonization, data consistency and reliability, the integration of geo-referenced datasets, big data and new technologies, and data disaggregation. All these are relevant for collecting and effectively using demographic evidence for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The report ends with a set of policy recommendations for strengthening the demographic evidence base for its effective use for development planning, decision-making and monitoring progress.

Demographic data, together with other types of information, are essential to review progress, plan and implement actions to achieve the goals and targets of the Programme

of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), and those of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The need for reliable, timely and disaggregated data was recognized in the Independent Advisory Group on a Data Revolution for Sustainable Development (2014), and was confirmed in the 2030 Agenda. The focus of this report is on the evidence on the size, growth and distribution of the population, as well as on births, deaths and migration.

### **Ladies and gentlemen,**

Population and housing **censuses** are an essential source of population data by age and sex, marital status, location, educational attainment, occupation, ethnicity, migrant status, and other relevant characteristics. They enumerate all the people in a country at a particular time and yield data for small population groups and small geographic areas; they are consequently critical to assess whether any group is being left behind in the development process.

A large majority of countries have conducted at least one census per decade since the 1990s. In 2014, 214 countries or areas conducted a census in 2005-2014, covering 93 per cent of the world's population. However, efforts need to be maintained to improve the coverage and quality of census data, as noted in the most recent (2015) revision of the *UN Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing*.

Increasing use of ICT innovations is helping to improve all stages of census operations, including cartographic updates (with GPS devices and geographical information systems, GIS), logistics, questionnaire design, and data collection, storage, analysis and dissemination. In addition, online dissemination of results, including dynamic tabulations based on microdata empower a new generation of data users to access information more relevant to their needs, location and disaggregation requirements.

**Population registers** are an alternative to censuses that continuously record selected information about each resident of a country. Population registers are an excellent source

of up-to-date statistics on the size, characteristics and location of the population and of its components of change: births, deaths and changes of residence.

When they record all changes of residence, including those of individuals who leave the country, population registers, and other administrative records of the entry, residence and employment of the foreign-born population, are uniquely valuable sources of information on international migration.

However, few countries, mostly in Europe, maintain population registers and use them for statistical purposes.

**Civil registration** is a critical source of demographic information that provides data on vital events on a continuous basis, as well as for small groups and small areas. A well-functioning civil registration system with information on births and deaths is a key source of data for vital statistics on fertility and mortality. Registration also helps to ensure that every person has a legal identity, facilitating access to the benefits and protections of the state. The SDGs call for universal birth registration, but in 2015, 230 million children under five still lacked a birth certificate, including 85 million in Africa and 35 million in Asia and Oceania.

Civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems in many countries need improvements in coverage and data quality, and better coordination with the health system. Among 234 countries or areas, only 60 per cent register at least 90 per cent of births, and just 56 per cent register at least 90 per cent of deaths. Furthermore, only 39 per cent have reasonably complete data on causes of death and 41 per cent lack data on most causes.

The sustainable improvement and expansion of CRVS in developing countries will require increased commitment from the countries themselves, as well as enhanced support from donors and the international community, including through various global initiatives, and regional ministerial conferences and plans of actions.

**Household surveys** are another key source, complementary to others, especially in countries lacking CRVS. Surveys are indeed the primary source of information on reproductive health, children, adult and maternal mortality, and KAP in many developing countries. Household-based demographic surveys have a long history, going back to the 1960s and 1970s. The current Demographic Health Surveys (DHS) and UNICEF's Multiple-Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) will remain critical in the post-2015 period.

Additionally, longitudinal surveys (following cohorts over time) have proven to be essential to ascertain the health status and socio-economic characteristics of older people. Surveys such as those on Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE), the Generations and Gender Programme (GGP), and WHO's Study of Global Ageing and Adult Health (SAGE), need to be maintained and expanded to provide key evidence on population ageing, a major global population trend in this period.

**Madame Chairperson,**

Preserving and strengthening the demographic evidence base requires the **compilation, harmonization and dissemination** of the requisite data. In this regard, the United Nations Statistics Division regularly gathers and disseminates aggregate demographic statistics from censuses and CRVS via the yearly Demographic Yearbook. UN-ECLAC CELADE maintain repositories of census micro-data in Latin America since 1970s, while IPUMS International compiles and provides access to numerous samples of census micro-data dating from 1960s.

**Global estimates** are necessary to fill data gaps, to reconcile differences between data sources, and to insure consistency, reliability international comparability of demographic data. The UN Population Division, that regularly updates data on the total, urban and rural population for all countries and areas of the world; migrant stocks and flows, the adolescent birth rate, contraceptive prevalence and unmet need for family planning for

MDG monitoring, while it collaborates with UNICEF, WHO, UNFPA and the World Bank to produce estimates of child mortality and maternal mortality.

Other relevant programs include the Human Mortality Database (HMD) run by the University of California at Berkeley and the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research, and the Human Fertility Database (HFD), by the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research and the Vienna Institute of Demography. UN-ECLAC CELADE maintains databases on internal and international migration, and on spatial population distribution and urbanization in Latin America. Another important reference is the Internal Migration around the Globe (IMAGE), which holds extensive, and internationally comparable data and estimates on internal migration for many countries in the world.

### **Ladies and gentlemen,**

In recent years, the growing production and dissemination of data with geographic references has been facilitating disaggregation by location. The **integration of geo-referenced datasets**, including those generated by satellites, layer and map different types of information. Such integration has proved essential in assessing the impacts of climate change, planning at the national and local levels, studying inequalities within countries and locating population groups vulnerable to natural disasters, famine and other risks.

The report mentions the main producers of open-access integrated geo-referenced datasets that include population indicators.

Let me say just a few words about “**Big Data**”, which encompasses large volumes of digital information generated continuously by GPS devices, mobile phones, automated teller machines, scanning devices, sensors, satellites, search engines and social media. Big data is emerging as a potential new and rich source of information to complement traditional sources of population data. In the field of demography, some of the most

promising areas of application involve the use of satellite imagery and Call Detail Records (CDR) generated by mobile phones to study human mobility and population distribution.

For many other topics, Big Data still lacks population representativity. At this point it seems appropriate that Governments and the public would benefit from the development of policies for the use of big data, including safeguards to ensure privacy and confidentiality, and guidelines to facilitate access to data controlled by private firms.

Distinguished delegates,

In one of the last chapters, the report notes that review of progress of the 2030 Agenda will require **disaggregated population data**, including for groups defined by income, sex, age, migratory status, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.

The primary sources that allow for disaggregation are censuses, population registers and CRVS, which [aim to] cover the whole population. In this regard, the report recommends to: a) promote access to micro-data for the full population, with confidentiality safeguards; b) link population registers and administrative data, or with surveys to complement; and c) geo-reference all data at the smallest administrative level to facilitate data integration between data sources.

**In conclusion**, the recommendations in the report can be grouped in three categories:

1) Support censuses and civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS), by:

- Contributing anonymized micro-data of the 2010 round of censuses and surveys to national, regional and international repositories (essential to provide a baseline for global SDG monitoring);
- Supporting the complete enumeration of the population and its basic characteristics as part of the 2020 round of censuses;

- Supporting the Global Financing Facility for Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child, and Adolescent Health (GFF) or other financing mechanisms to strengthen CRVS and health information systems.

2) Strengthen household survey programmes and administrative registers, by:

- Improving national capacity to conduct surveys while adhering to international guidelines for data collection, documentation and dissemination;
- Supporting greater cooperation between research institutions and NSOs, including through South-South cooperation;
- Continuing to support national and international data harmonization and integration between multiple data sources.

and

3) Leverage ICT and new data sources to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the demographic evidence for SDG, by:

- Geo-referencing and the dissemination of datasets including spatial information to become standard practice in all data collection efforts
- Supporting the integration of demographic and other types of data sources, and consider adopting open-data policies for public-use, geo-referenced and anonymized micro-data from all major sources, including censuses, surveys and civil registration, with safeguards to privacy and confidentiality.

Thank you, Madame Chairperson