

CHAPTER 2

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe High-level Regional Conference Geneva, Switzerland, 1 to 2 July 2013²

SUMMARY

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)³ in cooperation with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) carried out an implementation review of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development in the ECE region from August 2012 to July 2013. The review process included preparation of a regional report based on responses of ECE member States to a global survey, three thematic expert meetings, and a high-level regional conference.

The ECE secretariat, after studying global survey results, relevant existing studies, and data provided in country implementation profiles, prepared the report “ICPD Beyond 2014: The UNECE Region’s Perspective”, assessing implementation of the provisions of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development across the region. The report’s findings confirmed the continuing relevance of the Programme of Action to achieving inclusive social and economic development, prosperous societies and environmental sustainability, based on gender equality and the respect for human rights.

The review in the region concluded with the ECE Regional Conference entitled “Enabling Choices: Population Priorities for the 21st Century”. The Conference took place in Geneva, Switzerland, from 1 to 2 July 2013, organized jointly by ECE and UNFPA and hosted by the Government of Switzerland.

The Conference brought together more than 300 participants, including official delegations from 43 ECE member States, officials from the United Nations Secretariat and UNFPA, representatives of other United Nations programmes and specialized agencies, representatives of intergovernmental organizations, as well as numerous representatives of academia and non-governmental organizations.

The Conference was structured around three major themes: (a) population dynamics and sustainable development; (b) inequalities, social inclusion and rights; and (c) families and sexual and reproductive health over the life course. It addressed issues such as poverty, exclusion, low fertility, migration, ageing, sexual and reproductive health and rights through the prisms of sustainability, rights, equity and dignity. It stressed the need to better integrate population dynamics (i.e., ageing) into development planning at the national and subnational levels; take a long-term, holistic, rights-based approach; invest in building human capital throughout the life course of individuals; enable choices and the right to self-determination; and ensure lifelong equal opportunities for all. A special panel also discussed partnership and international cooperation.

The principal background document for Conference deliberations was the ECE regional report.⁴ Other background documents included the discussion reports of the three thematic expert meetings held jointly by ECE and the UNFPA Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia in preparation for

² The full title of the meeting is “Enabling Choices: Population Priorities for the 21st Century”.

³ The terms “ECE” and “UNECE” are used interchangeably.

⁴ United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (2014). *UNECE Regional Report — ICPD Beyond 2014: The UNECE Region’s Perspective* (United Nations publication). Available at http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/pau/icpd/Conference/Regional_Report/Regional_Report_ECE_ENG_WEB.pdf (accessed on 1 August 2014).

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the Conference and a report on socioeconomic and demographic trends in the region, with scenarios for the future prepared by the Wittgenstein Centre for Demography and Global Human Capital in Vienna.⁵

The Conference outcome document was a Chair's summary based on consultations and consensus of the Conference. The summary acknowledged the progress made and highlighted the challenges faced by the region, including diverging trends in mortality and morbidity across countries and population groups within countries, an incomplete gender equality agenda, inequalities in access to sexual and reproductive health information and services, discrimination against and social exclusion of migrants, minorities and other disadvantaged groups, and increasing inequalities in access to employment and income opportunities, which particularly disadvantages young people.

The summary stressed that the human rights of individuals should be at the centre of development processes and that sexual and reproductive health are central to the development agenda. Participants called for the results of the review of the International Conference on Population and Development beyond 2014 to be integrated into the post-2015 development agenda.

The summary also emphasized the need for reliable data, including data on vulnerable groups, and called for protecting the rights of migrants, especially victims of human trafficking, and for ensuring that governance is based on accountability, participation, transparency and the rule of law.

⁵ Other background documents to the Conference are available at <http://www.unece.org/icpd-2014/unece-regional-conference.html> (accessed on 1 August 2014).

Chair's summary of the Economic Commission for Europe Regional Conference

The High-level Regional Conference “Enabling Choices: Population Priorities for the 21st Century”, held from 1 to 2 July 2013 in Geneva, Switzerland, was organized jointly by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), and hosted by the Government of Switzerland.

The Conference marked the culmination for the ECE region⁶ of a process aimed at reviewing the implementation of the Programme of Action adopted by the International Conference on Population and Development, held in 1994 in Cairo, Egypt. Its objective was to assess the progress made in implementing the Programme of Action in the region, highlight lessons learned and successful approaches, and make recommendations on the further implementation of the Programme of Action in the UNECE region beyond 2014.

The review process in the region included the ICPD Beyond 2014 Global Survey, as well as a regional report based on the survey results and a study of population trends and policies in the region. It also included three thematic consultations corresponding to the three thematic sessions of the Regional Conference, as well as consultations with civil society, young people and parliamentarians.

The ECE Regional Report summarizes information on legislation, policies, programmes and strategies adopted and implemented by ECE member States in relation to the Programme of Action. Overall, the report confirmed the Programme of Action's continuing relevance for achieving inclusive social and economic development, prosperous societies and environmental sustainability, based on gender equality and respect for human rights. It indicates that significant progress has been made in policy development and programming.

The analysis shows that societies can prosper under conditions of slow or no population growth and ageing if they adapt their institutions and equitably invest in people's education, health and employment opportunities independently of gender, age and origin. Still, the region faces many barriers and challenges in developing people's full potential. These include unacceptably high differences in mortality and morbidity between countries and between groups within countries, an incomplete agenda of gender equality and women's economic empowerment, political leadership and participation in decision-making, large inequalities in access to sexual and reproductive health information and services, discrimination and social exclusion of migrants, minorities and other disadvantaged groups, and increasing inequalities in access to employment and income opportunities which affect in particular, young people.

The Conference was chaired by Ambassador Urs Schmid of Switzerland and consisted of five sessions. The opening plenary session included a keynote speech by Ms. Tarja Halonen, former President of Finland, followed by an intervention by young people on their vision and priorities for the region, and by the presentation and discussion of the ECE Regional Report on the outcome of the ICPD Beyond 2014 Global Survey in the region. Three thematic sessions were dedicated to the following topics: population dynamics and sustainable development; families and sexual and reproductive health over the life course; and inequalities, social inclusion and rights. Each thematic session commenced with a keynote presentation and two discussant interventions and proceeded with statements by delegations and discussions on the respective topics. Young people presented the Call to Action adopted by the Regional Youth Forum held in Istanbul in May 2013. A panel session on partnership and international cooperation

⁶ The ECE region encompasses 56 countries in Europe and Central Asia, as well as Canada, Israel and the United States of America. See also annex.

for advancing the agenda of the International Conference on Population and Development beyond 2014 also took place during the Conference.

Participants included representatives of governmental authorities, including high-level officials, academia, civil society organizations and youth, as well as members of national parliaments. Experts representing relevant United Nations agencies and other international and regional intergovernmental organizations also participated. In total, over 300 participants from 44 ECE member States and one area attended the Conference.

At the closing session of the Conference, Ambassador Urs Schmid, Chair of the Conference, presented this summary, which was prepared in consultation with the Conference participants.

PROGRESS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Participants welcomed the findings and conclusions of the review of the implementation of the Programme of Action and its follow-up beyond 2014, and reaffirmed their commitment to the agenda of the International Conference on Population and Development. They emphasized that people should be at the centre of development, with particular attention to human rights, gender equality, health and education, especially the education of girls.

Population dynamics and sustainable development

Participants noted that in the ECE region, people are living longer, healthier lives and have higher levels of education than past generations. This has been accompanied by lower fertility, population ageing and more complex migration patterns, with resultant policy implications, all set against a backdrop of economic crisis. Participants underscored the need for better integration of population dynamics into development planning at the national and subnational levels in order to comprehensively respond to demographic change and its implications. Participants also underlined the necessity to take a long-term, holistic, rights-based approach to population dynamics and its interlinkages with sustainable development.

It was stressed that policies in both low- and high-fertility countries should be based on the right of individuals to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children and to have the information and means to do so, taking into account the need for such policies to be based on evidence and best practices. Participants emphasized a recommendation for policymakers to develop a holistic approach and family-friendly, gender-sensitive and responsive policies across all relevant sectors — including health, education, employment and migration. Policies need to support all forms of families and address in particular, vulnerable families. They should also enable women and men to find a balance between family and work responsibilities, e.g., with flexible, affordable care options for children and older persons. Assumptions about low fertility were questioned by participants, as below-replacement-level fertility is not a threat if accompanied by adequate investments in health, education and employment opportunities. Participants also highlighted the evidence that in the European context, gender equality contributes to higher levels of fertility and to women's participation in the labour force. Moreover, participants emphasized that many countries with slow or no population growth are very prosperous.

One of the major successes identified by participants was that in many countries of the ECE region, people live longer and healthier lives. The reasons for this success include improvements in public health and better access to health services, including sexual and reproductive health services, progress in medicine, as well as the adoption of healthier lifestyles. At the same time, persisting differences in life expectancy and adverse trends in mortality, especially among working-age men, in some countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia were pointed out as an area of concern. Participants recommended that particular attention is paid to addressing excess mortality among men in these countries.

Participants recommended that Governments invest in building human capital throughout the life course of individuals, particularly in building the capacities of adolescents and young people and developing their full potential, and allow them meaningful participation in all stages of the formulation, implementation and evaluation of policies and programmes, such as those related to job creation and employment.

Participants emphasized the right to quality education at all levels in a safe and participatory environment, and to decent work for young people through effective policies and programmes that generate employment that is secure and non-discriminatory and provides a decent wage and opportunities for career development. Participants were of the opinion that this is essential for social cohesion and for ensuring social, economic and human development, as well as returns from the demographic dividend in the less developed countries of the region where this is relevant.

Participants recommended the promotion of healthy lifestyles among adolescents and young people, with access to youth-friendly health services and social security coverage, in order to improve the lives of the future generations of older persons. To better respond to ageing societies, participants recommended that effective policies and programmes be adopted, aimed at providing appropriate health and social services. The Conference participants believed that prevention of discrimination, securing the health care, income and social networks of older persons will allow societies to benefit from their productivity and contribution as caregivers, volunteers and entrepreneurs, and reap the longevity dividend of current and future generations of older persons. Participants recommended that support be given to communities and families to ensure that older persons receive the long-term care they need, and to promote independent, active and healthy ageing at the place of residence.

Participants noted that population ageing in the ECE region has implications for intergenerational equity, and called for policies and measures that take into account that in most countries, relatively small generations of young people will shoulder higher per capita support for older generations.

Participants noted that in many countries, migration of young people from rural to urban areas is having a substantial impact on both rural and urban communities. They recommended that Governments formulate innovative policies and measures that are responsive to the evolving nature of these communities and create dynamic relations between rural and urban areas.

Participants recommended that greater attention be given to protecting and fulfilling the human rights of migrants, almost half of which are women and girls who are particularly vulnerable, including victims of human trafficking and those forced to leave their homes due to humanitarian crises. Participants also called for promoting policies that foster the integration and reintegration of migrants. They called for ensuring regional and international portability of acquired benefits from work abroad and migration. Participants were in agreement that migration can be of benefit for both countries of origin and destination, noting, however, the different impact that migration has each.

Participants noted the impact of climate change and that the ECE region has the highest levels of consumption and CO₂ emissions globally, which has implications for the whole world. They called for further emphasis on innovations aimed at energy efficiency and in progressive adaptation policies related to climate change.

Families, sexual and reproductive health over the life course

Participants emphasized that freedom and the ability and right to make informed choices and decisions empower individuals to fulfil their potential and participate fully in economies and societies. They underscored that the promotion and protection of sexual and reproductive health and rights are essential to achieving gender equality, social justice and sustainable development.

Participants called upon Governments to take a human rights-based approach to sexual and reproductive health, including support for sexual and reproductive health services that protect women's and girls' general health and well-being, allow for well-informed decisions and are respectful of individual choices. Participants stressed the need for national legislation and policies to be free of any form of discrimination, coercion and violence, including intimate partner violence. Governments, in partnership with parliamentary networks and civil society organizations, should take effective steps to combat practices violating the reproductive rights of women and adolescent girls, such as spousal or parental consent requirements to receive health services, forced sterilization and forced abortion or discrimination in education and employment due to pregnancy and motherhood. Participants also called for the removal of all barriers preventing women and girls from access to safe abortion services and for protecting the rights of people living with HIV to access sexual and reproductive health services and education.

Participants recognized that gender-sensitive and life skills based comprehensive sexuality education, in a manner consistent with evolving capacity, is essential for adolescents and young people to be able to protect themselves from unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV and AIDS, to promote values of tolerance, mutual respect and non-violence in relationships, and to plan their lives. They called for the design and implementation of programmes, in particular youth-friendly programmes, that provide accurate information about human sexuality, including: growth and development; sexual anatomy and physiology; reproduction, contraception, pregnancy and childbirth; STIs, including HIV and AIDS; family life and interpersonal relationships; culture and sexuality; human rights empowerment; non-discrimination, equality and gender roles; sexual behaviour; sexual abuse; gender-based violence; and harmful practices; as well as, opportunities to explore values, attitudes and norms concerning sexual and social relationships, deal positively and responsively with their sexuality, promote the acquisition of skills and encourage young people to assume responsibility for their own behaviour and to respect the rights of others, taking into account scientific data and evidence.

Participants recommended that professional groups such as health-care providers, members of the judiciary, teachers, social workers and law enforcement personnel be provided with training to enhance their understanding of human rights-based, gender-sensitive and responsive, non-discriminatory approaches to all individuals, regardless of age, sex, race, ethnicity, class, religious affiliation, marital status, occupation, disability, HIV status, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, immigration status or language.

Participants reaffirmed the critical role policymakers, parliamentarians, community leaders and the media have in fostering an enabling environment for the full and equal enjoyment of human rights, including sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Participants particularly stressed the recommendation to improve access to information, counselling, supplies and services that increase the ability of all couples and individuals to make free and informed decisions about the number and spacing of children. They emphasized that highest priority needs to be given to preventing unintended pregnancies by, inter alia, removing all barriers to access to contraceptives, including restrictions based on age or marital status, or the prohibition of certain contraceptive methods. The need to supplement affordable contraception with free contraception for marginalized groups was emphasized. Emergency contraception and counselling services need to be made available in a timely and non-judgmental manner to all women and adolescent girls. Participants further recommended that sexual and reproductive health services that offer a high quality of care be made widely available to all young people according to their needs. Availability includes both affordability and convenience, which generally implies a range of comprehensive and integrated services. Another recommendation made by participants was to have sexual and reproductive health services for women and men integrated within a system that offers both primary health care and referrals for more specialized

needs. The need to strengthen health systems in some countries of the region was also stressed by participants.

Participants observed that sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV and AIDS, continued to be a major concern in the UNECE region. Their prevention and treatment need to be an important part of health system responses. Investment in STI prevention will reduce leading causes of health problems for women of reproductive age, including secondary infertility — the prevalence of which is increasing in the region. Participants recommended that all Governments assume full ownership over the long term of their response to STIs, including HIV and AIDS, rather than relying on donor funding. The participants also recommended more funding for prevention and treatment of STIs, including, but not limited to, HIV. Funding and attention are especially needed in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

Participants called for eliminating preventable maternal mortality and morbidity by ensuring that all women have access to quality prenatal care and that all births are attended by skilled health personnel. Access to emergency obstetric care and management of complications arising from unsafe abortions, including revising restrictions within existing abortion laws, should be integrated into policies and practices to safeguard the lives of women and adolescent girls. Participants further called for establishing mechanisms that foster the compliance of providers with regard to human rights and ethical and professional standards.

Participants emphasized the need for comprehensive sexuality education training to be fully integrated into undergraduate and in-service training of teachers, school psychologists and social workers. Participants also recommended assisting parents through special programmes to increase their awareness of the benefits of comprehensive sexuality education for their children.

Participants recognized the sexual and reproductive health needs of migrants and recommended that affordable access to sexual and reproductive health services be made available to them in their own language and in places that are accessible to them. The Governments of countries of origin and destination should act jointly in a coordinated manner to address needs and rights of migrants.

Participants noted that laws and practices that criminalize consensual adult sexual behaviours and relationships, including outside of marriage and those of voluntary sex work, potentially marginalize the status of individuals in society, while constituting a public health threat.

In view of the fact that population ageing is a salient feature of demographic development in the region, participants called for ensuring effective policies and programmes related to sexual and reproductive health services that better respond to the needs of an ageing population.

Participants underscored the need for Governments and societies in general to ensure zero tolerance for gender-based violence and call for measures to criminalize violence against women and girls, provide all victims/survivors of gender-based violence with access to critical services, including 24-hour hotlines, and psychosocial and mental health support. Treatment of injuries, post-rape care, including emergency contraception, post-exposure prophylaxis for HIV prevention and access to safe abortion services in cases of violence, rape and incest should be provided in a timely manner.

Increasing access of men and boys to sexual and reproductive health information, counselling and services is recommended by the participants. Participants also called on countries across the region to give more priority to engaging men and boys in promoting participation and equal sharing of responsibilities, such as care work, including through support programmes that target men and boys and sensitize them to gender equality and rights issues. Participants also recommended that priority be given to awareness-raising campaigns and to the introduction of programmes aimed at ending sex selection in the countries affected.

Participants noted the diversity in the forms of the family in the region and called for appropriate public policy responses, responsive legal frameworks and support, including financial support, facilitating work-life reconciliation, providing quality early childhood education and quality care for both children and older persons. They also noted the need to address harmful gender norms, such as ideas of what are appropriate roles for boys and men, girls and women. Transforming gender norms is vital for the success of family policies. A life course approach is needed as individuals move in and out of families and partnerships, and as they experience various family transitions. This life course approach is also essential to ensure the protection of family members, including children, rendered vulnerable due to family circumstances.

Inequalities, social inclusion and rights

Participants underscored that the realization of human potential and innovation depends upon guaranteed rights of personhood, bodily integrity and protection from violence; the right to health, education, housing, livelihoods; and the benefits of scientific development. They noted that many groups, in particular women, girls and minorities, continue to suffer from multiple and overlapping forms of disempowerment and discrimination. Participants called for policies to advance gender equality, enable equal participation and social inclusion of all individuals through cross-sectoral strategies including protection against violence and abuse; preventing sex selection; creating employment opportunities for women, youth, older persons, persons with disabilities and other marginalized groups; raising awareness about their rights and facilitate their access to social services; and preventing discrimination, stigmatization and other forms of social exclusion.

Participants called for equality before the law and non-discrimination for all persons in the exercise of their social, cultural, economic, civil and political rights. They emphasized the need to promulgate or enforce laws that punish any kind of discrimination, violence or hate crimes and take active steps to protect people in the region from discrimination, stigma and violence.

Participants emphasized that the ECE region is seen as a leader in the progress towards gender equality, and pointed out the successes in ensuring equal access to education, employment and political participation. At the same time, persistent gender inequalities and harmful practices were pointed out by participants as an area of concern. Participants emphasized that the achievement of gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment can make a significant contribution to poverty reduction, inclusive growth, democratic governance, and peace and justice.

Participants called for the enactment and effective implementation of laws that allow education in an environment free from discrimination, violence, mobbing and bullying. They also called for inclusive education with gender-sensitive curricula in formal education systems, complemented or reinforced by programmes, peer education or sexual and reproductive health-related interventions delivered by non-governmental organizations and other civil society groups and supported through Government funding. Governments, civil society organizations and communities were called upon by participants to work together to ensure a scaling-up of effective sexual and reproductive health services for marginalized groups. Increased educational levels were also recommended by participants as an important tool in fighting unemployment and poverty.

Participants noted that despite the considerable progress made in the region, challenges from multiple and overlapping forms of inequality, disempowerment and discrimination still needed to be addressed. They called for measures to ensure non-discrimination in the exercise of the social, cultural, economic, civil and political rights of all individuals and to guarantee equality before the law, including the right to gainful employment, residence and access to services.

Participants highlighted the role of responsive governance based on accountability, participation, transparency and rule of law to address inequalities and achieve social inclusion and rights. They called

on Governments and other stakeholders to continue to strengthen partnerships with civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations, provide adequate and sustainable funding, and support the work of civil society organizations in eliminating social exclusion.

Partnership and international cooperation

Participants expressed the view that with the deepening of globalization, issues of population and development have become increasingly intertwined with global economic, social and environmental concerns. This requires a multi-stakeholder and international approach, including national Governments, the United Nations, donors, civil society and youth organizations, religious leaders and the private sector, to promote international cooperation efforts, including the development of joint programmes and initiatives, strengthening of policy dialogue and coordination, transfer of knowledge and technology, and allocation and mobilization of financial and technical resources.

While recognizing the role of civil society organizations as an advocate and service provider, an expert and a watch dog for sexual and reproductive health and rights, participants called for strengthened partnerships among local, national and international civil society organizations in the design, implementation, coordination, monitoring and evaluation of population and development programmes and policies, and encouraged the promotion of activities directed at increasing the participation and strengthening the capacity of these organizations. Participants recognized the need for increased funding to civil society organizations so that they can continue to play their multiple roles effectively on the ground.

Participants also called for strengthening partnerships with the private sector in the design, implementation, coordination, monitoring and evaluation of population and development programmes and policies, in particular in the areas of service delivery and commodity production and distribution.

Advancing the agenda of the International Conference on Population and Development is only possible through strengthened international solidarity and through strong collaboration between countries. Countries should prioritize these challenges by emphasizing good governance, by making domestic resources available, by involving civil society actors and by addressing legislative and cultural barriers that impede access to sexual and reproductive health services.

Participants emphasized the need for institutions in the region, including ECE and UNFPA, to strengthen and ensure adequate human and financial resources to support the implementation of the recommendations of the review of the International Conference on Population and Development beyond 2014. They also called for a respect of the commitment of 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product for official development assistance (ODA).

Cross-cutting issues

Participants recommended that more attention be paid to generating, collecting and using quality, timely and disaggregated census, survey and vital registration data for the purposes of research and analysis, as well as of planning, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes. They also recommended employing comparable methodologies across studies and sectors, within countries and the region. These measures are particularly important in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, where better data are also needed on migration, human trafficking, early marriage, gender-based violence, sex selection, teenage pregnancy, the situation of older persons and persons with disabilities.

Participants called for strengthening of policies and legislation that are evidence-based by utilizing qualitative and quantitative data, disaggregated by age, sex and social vulnerability criteria. Participants noted that a gap still existed between legislation, policies and their implementation. They

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called for youth involvement in the design of programmes and policies, and in their monitoring and evaluation. Special emphasis was placed on the need to ensure adequate funding, involvement of stakeholders and beneficiaries, and accountability systems for follow-up. Participants also recommended the establishment of a regional platform to exchange lessons learned and good practices, and to promote effective interventions for scaling up. In general, the region has rich experiences and capacities in implementing the agenda of the International Conference on Population and Development, yet in some countries and in some areas, capacity is lacking. Participants recommended that more attention be given to strengthening capacity by promoting “South-South” exchanges within the region.

Recognizing the returns of investing in the implementation of the Programme of Action, participants recommended that Governments at all levels, as well as communities, strive to increase budget allocations and to ensure their effective utilization.

Participants recommended the creation of a mechanism for continuous follow-up of the implementation of the Programme of Action, including in the context of the post-2015 development agenda.

CONCLUSION

The Conference outcomes, together with the ECE Regional Report on the International Conference on Population and Development beyond 2014, will constitute an agenda for the region's implementation of the Programme of Action beyond 2014 and to the global review process. Given the centrality of sexual and reproductive health in the development agenda, participants called for the integration of the results of the review of the International Conference on Population and Development beyond 2014 into the post-2015 development agenda. This summary will, through the good offices of the Government of Switzerland, as host and Chair of the Conference, be forwarded to the Secretary-General of the United Nations for consideration and possible further action. A formal report and proceedings of the meeting will be prepared and issued by the organizers of the Conference.