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Report on implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action in the UNECE region and brief report on the results of the ICPD beyond 2014 global survey

UNECE Regional Report on 'ICPD beyond 2014' Survey Results: Executive summary¹

Note by secretariat

I. ICPD beyond 2014

1. The Programme of Action (PoA) of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), which was endorsed by 179 countries in Cairo in 1994, redefined population issues primarily from the perspective of people's empowerment and human rights-based development. The focus on population policies at the macro level, defined with demographic targets, shifted towards a new paradigm of enabling people—in particular women and those from vulnerable groups—to make informed choices, pursuing their own life aspirations; and with an emphasis on sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights. The ICPD PoA also established a broader understanding of the linkages between population and development, including aspects such as gender equality, health, education, urbanization, migration, the environment, sustainable economic development and the role of civil society in governance.

2. In 2010, the General Assembly (GA) of the United Nations reaffirmed the ICPD PoA goals and objectives and initiated a thorough review of the implementation of the PoA 20 years after its adoption. GA resolution 65/234 established a roadmap for achieving the vision of the ICPD PoA beyond 2014 (ICPD Beyond 2014) and requested the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to lead the review process. The review was designed to

¹ This document has been submitted after the official documentation deadline due to necessary consultations.

inform the Global Report of the UN Secretary General to the General Assembly on the ICPD PoA in 2014. The Global ICPD Beyond 2014 Report is to be founded on reports prepared by the regional commissions, including the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).

3. The UNECE regional report provides an overview of achievements and challenges experienced by UNECE member States 20 years after the adoption of the PoA. The report is based mainly on country implementation profiles (CIP) comprising country-level indicators, and on information provided by member States in response to a Global Survey about policies, programmes, strategies and legislation developed to implement the ICPD PoA at country level. While CIPs were drawn from international statistical databases covering all UNECE countries, responses to the Global Survey questionnaire are available for 45 member States.

II. The socio-economic and demographic context in the UNECE region

4. The implementation of the 1994 ICPD PoA started during a critical period in the history of the eastern part of the UNECE region where a profound transition towards more democratic and economically dynamic societies was taking place. In most countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, the 1990s were years of economic hardship, followed by a recovery during the 2000s. Beyond the economic turmoil the populations in these countries experienced significant social changes in value systems and norms, including important changes in the legislative systems. The western UNECE countries underwent societal changes as well, though more gradual.

A. Population dynamics

5. In 2010 the total population of the UNECE region amounted to 1.24 billion people, up from 1.18 billion in 2000. The number of people aged 65 years or above has increased to 174.5 million and accounted for 14.1 per cent of region's total population. Population growth in the region is expected to slow down in the next few decades while the proportion of aged 65 years and older will rise to 20 per cent by 2030 and 26 per cent by 2050. Central Asia is the only part of the region in which the proportion of older people is projected to remain below 15 per cent by 2050.

6. Life expectancy at birth grew by five years on average for men and by about three years for women in the UNECE region between 1990 and 2010, and this trend is expected to continue.

7. In 2010, the region's average total fertility rate (TFR) was 1.8 children per woman of reproductive age. During the last decade a moderate increase was observed, with the TFR rising slightly in a number of countries. Postponement of childbearing is a major trend in fertility observed across the region. Extra-marital births and childlessness are on the rise in many countries.

8. Abortion rates have declined considerably across the region, along with a sustained availability and increased use of modern contraception, particularly in the eastern part of the region. The proportion of teenage mothers has decreased and is low on average: less than 5 per cent of all children are born to teenage mothers. However, adolescent birth rates remain high in North America, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

9. International migration soared in the beginning of the 1990s with the start of the transition in the eastern part of the region. During the 2000s it remained significant in size.

Large negative net migration was characteristic for many new European Union Member States, Central Asia and a number of East and South-East European countries. Western Europe, North America and the Russian Federation saw a surge in positive net migration.

B. Current socio-economic environment

10. The first decade of the 21st century saw two distinct periods in the region's economic development: the region's economy grew until the late 2000s, when a serious financial and economic crisis began to affect most UNECE countries. Stagnant or negative economic growth, rising inequalities, high unemployment, in particular among the youth, and social and political instability in some cases have marked the last five years. In an attempt to counter the impact of the financial crisis, governments in many UNECE countries resorted to fiscal austerity measures that affected various social benefits and squeezed funding for many social programmes important to the ICPD PoA. The lasting effects of the financial and economic crisis are seen by many countries as the most important barrier that impedes the implementation of the ICPD PoA.

III. Key Findings from ICPD Beyond 2014 Survey

11. Overall the countries in the UNECE region report a wide variety of policies, programmes and strategies related to the ICPD PoA. They expand beyond traditional population policies to include social and welfare policies covering vulnerable groups and specifically youth, older people, people with disabilities, and women. Most of these policies were updated or initiated during the last five years. Sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights have acquired a special focus. The PoA implementation has advanced effectively in the UNECE region with regard to empowering people to make individual choices and to realize their human rights. Yet some challenges remain, while others have emerged anew since 1994.

12. An approach common to all countries in the western part of the UNECE region is to regulate population and development issues cross-sectionally through a variety of social and welfare policies. While this approach guarantees full coverage of the issues and protects human rights, it poses two potential challenges. Firstly, if a given issue is not identified as a priority in all specific policy areas, it might be accorded less attention than necessary. Secondly, monitoring specific population issues in such circumstances requires the consideration of a variety of policies, which makes analysis more complex. One way to address this challenge in future would be the use of cross-sectional indicators.

13. The cross-sectional approach is "work in progress" in countries in the eastern part of the UNECE region, where the application of demographic strategies complemented by policies that address ICPD PoA issues is more widespread.

14. Data and research need enhancement in some of the countries in the eastern part of the region, and specifically in the countries in Central Asia. Useful data could be gathered with soundly-designed and internationally-comparable surveys, which are often lacking in these countries. Higher quality research can be conducted with exchange of knowledge and good practices among institutions in the eastern and western parts of the region.

VI. Persistent and Emerging Issues: Population Priorities in the 21st Century

A. Population and Sustainable Development

15. In line with the ICPD PoA and with the declarations adopted at the Rio Conference on Sustainable Development and the Rio+20 process, UNECE countries have strengthened their approach to population through the sustainable development lens, thus pursuing a more integrated approach, taking into account different determinants of development.

16. The deepening of population ageing calls for a stronger focus on older persons in future policymaking and programming. Countries, conscious of the related challenges, have put ageing-related policy frameworks in place. Sustainable development is only possible if systems in society are adjusted to the new balance of generations. To reap the benefits of longer life, policies to ensure active and healthy ageing for all, curbing inequality and ensuring autonomy, quality of life, and dignity of the elderly are essential elements.

17. Decline in population growth is another important feature in many countries of the region. Population shrinking and even depopulation observed in certain regions within countries raise concerns, because productive land is underutilized and infrastructure deteriorates, and the quality of services provided to the remaining population may decline.

18. UNECE countries concerned with low fertility could strengthen rights-based and human-centred policies aimed at removing the health, economic, financial and social barriers that prevent families and individuals from realizing their fertility choices. Policies need to enable women to combine their educational and career aspirations with fertility plans.

19. Countries may need to expand policies that address the root causes of migration, facilitate the flow and productive investment of remittances, and develop the capacity of migrant community groups to foster the integration of migrants into their host society.

20. The importance of investing in education is underlined by all countries. Outreach to vulnerable and disadvantaged children and youth, however, needs to be further strengthened. Specific areas of education also need to be enhanced, such as civic education, comprehensive sexuality education, and education in life skills. Environmental education is an emerging need that should be addressed through special curricula. Lifelong learning is becoming more widespread but needs further support.

B. Inequities and Social Exclusion

21. Among the major achievements of the past few decades is the design of policies aiming to reduce inequalities and enhance social inclusion. Still, many inequalities persist and have even increased in some areas, in connection with the economic crisis. In this regard, fighting poverty and creating decent jobs for the unemployed have been recognized by countries as persistent issues that require major policy attention in the future.

22. The analysis in this report revealed commendable achievements in bridging gender gaps in most UNECE countries, in particular with respect to completing secondary and higher education. (Now the less successful performance of boys needs special attention.) However, conditions still exist that discriminate against women and girls. The hourly gender pay gap is also persistent, although the trend is slightly towards reduction. The resulting gender gap in old age pensions requires further attention. Violence against women remains an issue.

23. In the last decade gender mainstreaming has been attained in a number of public policies. Challenges remain in monitoring the gender component in each and every policy. Gender sensitive monitoring instruments are recommended to identify the remaining gender gaps.

24. Although the analysis revealed progress with regard to addressing needs of population groups such as youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, and ethnic and other minority groups, structural disadvantages and vulnerability to unemployment and poverty persist in practically all countries. Migrants and minority groups, including the Roma, can be subject to double deprivation due to stigmatization and harmful practices and therefore require further policy attention in the countries concerned.

C. Families, the Life Course, and Sexual and Reproductive Health

1. Families and the life course

25. Declines in fertility and later births of the first child have been vivid expressions of the fact that many people of reproductive age do not find their conditions of life conducive to realizing their desire to have children. Conditions on the labour market, legal institutions, government support and social norms have been lagging behind the needs of people who wish to combine a career with a family. Reconciliation of work and family life should be more effectively addressed, particularly regarding the availability of public and private childcare facilities, the supply of which does not meet demand.

26. Non-traditional family forms have become more widespread, while legal mechanisms that may provide support to them have been slow to emerge. Non-married cohabitating couples, including those with children, and same-sex couples may require further policy attention factoring in the need to uphold and protect the human rights of all. Single-parent families require continued support. Increased attention is necessary to rights related to fatherhood. Poor families with children need more attention.

27. Young people who experience hardship, incurred by the lasting economic crisis and long term joblessness, remain “scarred” in subsequent periods of their lives. This issue has not attracted sufficient attention. Given the importance of ageing societies in the region, policies should avoid pitting the young against the old. Rather, it is important to pursue policies in which the interests of all generations are mutually reinforcing.

2. Sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights

28. Provisions for sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights (SRH&RR) that give people autonomy over their reproductive choices have been incorporated widely in policies and legislation. Policies and programmes have been implemented recently to enlarge the scope of services provided, including information and counselling on SRH&RR, as well as to broaden the coverage of population groups to ensure better inclusion of vulnerable and underserved groups. While education, mainly in secondary grades, has included topics of SRH&RR, comprehensive sexuality education in schools is still lacking in many countries and there is limited access to youth-friendly services, in particular sexual and reproductive health services.

29. Safe abortion, in circumstances where it is not against the law, is generally accessible region-wide. In a few countries it is legal only for rigorously-defined medical reasons or in specific cases such as rape. However, in a number of countries and particularly in rural regions access to high quality abortion services may still be an issue. The same applies for pre- and post-abortion counselling.

30. Postponement of births to later years of life as well as progress in reproductive technology has led to an increased call for artificial reproductive techniques. Further policy attention is required regarding access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) for persons with disabilities, the poor, migrants, marginalized groups and older persons. Integration of SRH services with HIV-related services and other health services and with the primary health care systems may need further strengthening across all countries. There is a need to reduce financial barriers to access to quality SRH services, particularly in some new European Union Member States and countries of Central Asia.

31. Although policies and action on HIV/AIDS issues are widespread, HIV prevalence (as well as that of other sexually transmitted infections) has increased considerably across countries. Rigorous research and monitoring is necessary to establish the causes and identify the necessary interventions and frameworks to prevent new HIV infection and to respond to the needs of people living with HIV in the region.

D. Governance

32. The survey shows that the most effective facilitating factor for implementing the ICPD PoA is the involvement of and partnership with civil society organizations, in particular non-governmental organizations (NGOs). NGOs are today supportive in many ways, such as awareness-raising and social mobilization, as well as advocacy and policy formulation. NGOs were reported to be less active, however, in the area of monitoring and evaluation of policy implementation. There has been a strong shift over recent years to involve civil society more strongly, thus generating a stronger sense of ownership of solutions to societal problems.

33. Citizens' awareness and involvement in upholding the ICPD PoA principles has increased. Raising awareness among potentially disadvantaged groups and specifically ethnic groups and minorities, requires greater attention because these groups are frequently socially excluded and can remain alienated from societal development.

34. Governments and private sector organizations find it mutually beneficial to partner primarily in service delivery, awareness creation and social mobilization.

35. Countries also emphasize the importance of regional cooperation on matters related to the ICPD PoA. Many of the issues that are key for achieving the ICPD goals, especially in the area of sustainable development – environment, economic development, migration – can only be achieved with strong regional coordination and agreement about the way forward. Therefore, it is important to agree upon common standards and norms, to exchange good practices and to work jointly towards ensuring solid international availability of data.

VI. The way forward

36. Twenty years later, the general principles and main directions of the recommended activities of the ICPD PoA remain valid. But priorities and policy recommendations need to be updated in the light of changing societal concerns and emerging issues in population dynamics across countries, including those which are more economically advanced. This is all the more relevant since such dynamics are likely to concern an increasing number of populations in the world as both fertility and mortality decline globally, leading to increasing ageing and to the deceleration of population growth. The lasting impact of the recent economic and financial crisis on the social and economic environment in many UNECE countries has also to be taken into account.

37. Policies, programmes and strategies developed in the UNECE region quite comprehensively address human rights, gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and other ICPD PoA issues, although the questionnaire information is insufficient to evaluate their effectiveness. The scope of reported policies, programmes and strategies is being enlarged to more fully encompass vulnerable population groups that reside on the edge of social exclusion. Where the population and development issues cut across a large set of public policies, a strengthened observance and better monitoring of the latter is needed. Beyond protecting human rights, policies can help people by alleviating barriers that hinder them from enabling their personal choices in life. Enabling choices is a broader realm of policy action that contributes to the betterment of life for all.

38. The important achievements in contemporary governance need to be furthered. Civil society organizations and particularly NGOs, along with citizens' participation in civic matters are increasingly constructive in raising awareness and exposing areas that need intensified policy action. The role of education in fostering responsiveness and social responsibility should increase; it is a social investment with high return.

39. Design of policy scope and application requires sound evidence that should be provided by relevant data and rigorous research. Enrichment of monitoring tools is needed. Data collection, including surveys, and support of academic and applied research is an investment that pays off with improved welfare for all.

40. In the wake of designing the post-2015 agenda, this regional review offers an opportunity for member States of the UNECE region to reassert their role in international development efforts as active participants in the realization of rights and empowerment and sustainable human development in their own countries and globally.
