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General Debate 3 (a): Actions for the further implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development at the global, regional and national levels

3 (b): Sustainable cities, human mobility and international migration

Statement submitted by International Union for the Scientific Study of Population, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council²

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

¹ [E/CN.9/2018/1](#).

² The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

The theme of the fifty-first session of the Commission on Population and Development, “Sustainable cities, human mobility and international migration,” provides an opportunity for the international community to draw on the latest demographic evidence to make policies and programmes more responsive to the basic needs and contributions of urban populations and migrants and to ensure that urban areas are sustainably adapting to growing populations.

The International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (IUSSP), the preeminent professional association of population scientists from around the world, has long been a partner of the United Nations in bringing timely demographic data and methods to bear on policy-relevant population issues. In this capacity, the IUSSP facilitates scientific work on population change and sustainable development, organizes training resources and activities, and supports the transfer of innovations and best practices across the globe in demographic research and methodologies.

Draw on a broad range of demographic evidence for the effective management of urban growth

Future population growth will occur almost entirely in urban areas and the world urban population is projected to increase by two-thirds by 2050. While many new arrivals in the outlying informal neighbourhoods of cities are rural-urban migrants, a large part of this growth will be due to the larger number of births than deaths among urban residents. Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia stand out as regions exhibiting the highest rates of urban population growth, estimated at 3.8 per cent per year for sub-Saharan Africa (doubling every 18 years on the average) and 2.4 per cent per year for South Asia (doubling every 29 years). India and Nigeria alone are projected to see their combined urban populations grow by 615 million people by 2050.

Approximately one in three urban residents in Asia, Africa and Latin America lives in slums with limited access to basic services, including health, education, sanitation and clean water. While urban fertility has decreased in recent years, urban unmet needs for modern contraception and unwanted fertility remain high, and the rapid growth in the number of adolescents and other disadvantaged subgroups living in cities translates into substantial needs for sexual and reproductive health services. Moreover, lower fertility facilitates household investments in children’s schooling — an aspect of the demographic dividend — and translates into a slower and more manageable pace of urban growth. Too often, however, evidence on family planning and other sexual and reproductive health services is left out of policy discussions on managing urban growth. In response, the IUSSP is undertaking a new initiative to increase attention to the value of family planning in urban development policy efforts, contribute to the evidence base needed to expand efforts in urban areas to meet family planning and reproductive health needs, and build the research capacity of young scholars in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia to produce high quality, policy-relevant research that can inform national efforts towards sustainable cities.

Strengthen migration data and research

Demographic evidence on migration not only informs policy discussions and guides sound policymaking, but also serves as an objective input to what can be heated policy debates on safe, orderly and regular migration. The IUSSP formed an Ad Hoc Panel on Strengthening Migration Data and Research and put forward specific recommendations for definitions and concepts of migration, including information that must be collected to identify and count international migrants, the voluntary or forced nature of the move, and situations of irregular migration.

Recommendations for strengthening migration data apply to the improved design and use of data from censuses, surveys and administrative sources, including border records, visas and residence permits data. Since migrants in an irregular situation tend to be absent from administrative routines and official surveys, indirect methods should be developed to approximate their numbers and characteristics. The IUSSP also provided specific recommendations for further research on migration to improve global understanding of how individuals and states can best take advantage of the opportunities migration offers and address its challenges for governments, societies and individuals in full respect of the human rights of the persons involved.

Invest in training in demographic methods and the innovative use of data sources

Much empirical evidence underlying migration and urbanization and their determinants and consequences is produced by scientists trained in demographic concepts, methods and knowledge. Demographic training includes a suite of methods to produce reliable estimates and projections from limited and defective data and analytical tools to examine systemic linkages between population stocks and flows across space and time. A renewed investment in demographic training is especially timely with the arrival of new data sources, from social media to satellites, and the consequent need to develop standards and robust methods for evaluating their quality.

The IUSSP invests in demographic training and supports the utilization of new data sources and methods that can provide evidence directly relevant for sustainable cities, human mobility and international migration. Examples of recent training topics include “Social Media, Big Data and Digital Demography”, “Bayesian Population Projections: Theory and Practice”, and “Geospatial Demography: Combining Satellite, Survey, Census and Cellphone Data to Provide Small-area Estimates”. With a premium on the use of evidence to speak to policies on sustainable urban growth and safe, orderly and regular migration comes a premium on investment in demographic training in the context of new data sources and methods, especially for technical staff within National Statistical Offices. We urge the Commission on Population and Development to consider these training needs to upgrade skills through both short and long-term training, and to request that adequate funding be channelled towards them.