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## Commission on Population and Development

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Item 4 of the provisional agenda\*

### Programme implementation and future programme of work of the Secretariat in the field of population

## Programme implementation and progress of work in the field of population in 2023: Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### *Summary*

The present report contains a review of progress made by the Secretariat in implementing its programme of work in the field of population during 2023. It covers the activities of the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs on the analysis of global trends in fertility, mortality, migration, urbanization and population ageing, the preparation of global population estimates and projections, the monitoring of population policies, the analysis of linkages between population and sustainable development, the dissemination of population data and information, technical cooperation with and capacity development provided to Member States and the support provided to intergovernmental processes.

The objective of the programme of work in the field of population in 2023 was to improve knowledge of global population trends, advance an evidence-based understanding of interaction between population change and sustainable development among policymakers and the public and strengthen the international community's capacity to effectively address current and emerging population issues and integrate the population dimension into the international development agenda. The Commission on Population and Development oversees the work of the Population Division and provides guidance on the programme of work as part of its annual session.

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\* [E/CN.9/2024/1](#).



## I. Introduction

1. The Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs is responsible for the implementation of the programme of work on population of the United Nations Secretariat. The programme of work is guided by the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development,<sup>1</sup> by the outcome of the twenty-first special session of the General Assembly on key actions for the further implementation of the Programme of Action (resolution [S-21/2](#), annex) and by the decision of the Assembly to extend the Programme of Action and the key actions for its further implementation beyond the original 20-year time-horizon in 2014 (resolution [65/234](#)). The outcomes of other relevant international conferences and summits are also taken into account, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (resolution [70/1](#)), the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (resolution [73/195](#)) and the Progress Declaration of the first International Migration Review Forum (resolution [76/266](#)). In addition, the work of the Secretariat in the field of population is guided by the resolutions and decisions of the Commission on Population and Development, in particular its resolution 2004/1 on the programme of work in the field of population ([E/2004/25-E/CN.9/2004/9](#), chap. I, sect. B), and by other relevant resolutions and decisions of the Assembly, including those related to international migration and development, and of the Economic and Social Council.

2. As described in the programme budget, the objective of the programme of work on population in 2023 was to improve knowledge of global population trends, advance an evidence-based understanding of interaction between population change and sustainable development among policymakers and the public and strengthen the international community's capacity to effectively address current and emerging population issues and integrate the population dimension into the international development agenda (see [A/77/6 \(Sect. 9\)](#), subprogramme 5, Population).

3. On behalf of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Population Division collaborates closely with the agencies, funds and programmes and other bodies of the United Nations system in implementing its programme of work and in supporting the follow-up to the International Conference on Population and Development. United Nations offices and missions, national Governments, academic researchers, media representatives and the public at large regularly consult with the Division to obtain timely and pertinent data, information and analyses on population patterns and trends and their connection with development issues.

4. The present report provides a summary of the activities and deliverables of the Population Division during 2023, which included the provision of support to intergovernmental processes, the preparation of reports of the Secretary-General and other parliamentary documents, the monitoring of internationally agreed development goals, the dissemination of population data and information and technical cooperation. A list of activities and outputs completed in 2023 is presented in the annex to the present report. Reference is also made in the report to work in progress in 2023 that is expected to result in one or more completed outputs in 2024 or beyond.

## II. Fertility and family planning

5. The Population Division continued its work to monitor adolescent fertility as custodian for Sustainable Development Goal indicator 3.7.2. The Division updated a global data set that includes information for 215 countries or areas on the birth rate

<sup>1</sup> *Report of the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 5–13 September 1994 (A/CONF.171/13/Rev.1)*, chap. I, resolution 1.

for girls aged 10–14 years and for 230 countries or areas on the birth rate of girls and women aged 15–19 years for the period from 2000 to 2020. The data for both age groups were submitted for publication in the Global Sustainable Development Goal Indicators Database.<sup>2</sup>

6. As the custodian for Sustainable Development Goal indicator 3.7.1 on the proportion of women of reproductive age who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods, the Population Division provided information relevant for the global monitoring of the indicator. The Division also provided inputs for the global monitoring on the family planning component of Sustainable Development Goal indicator 3.8.1 on the coverage of essential health services led by the World Health Organization (WHO)<sup>3</sup> and contributed to country consultations and enhancement of national capacities for reporting on this indicator.

7. The Population Division provided inputs for the development of two new indices on gender equality and women’s empowerment. These new indices expand measures that guide national and international policy action, research and advocacy.<sup>4</sup> The new Women’s Empowerment Index, a composite index, includes two indicators produced by the Division. The first indicator, women of reproductive age (ages 15–49) whose need for family planning is satisfied with modern contraceptive methods, reflects how universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, including modern contraception, is an essential aspect of women’s lives that allows them to fully realize their capabilities. The second indicator, adolescent birth rate (births to women ages 15–19 per 1,000 women ages 15–19), measures early childbearing that is linked to higher risk of maternal morbidity and mortality and is seen as an impediment to realizing capabilities in other dimensions of women’s empowerment, such as labour force participation, access to decent work and education, poverty alleviation and freedom from gender-based violence.

8. Staff of the Population Division co-authored three articles in peer-reviewed journals, on (a) alignment between desires and outcomes among women wanting to avoid pregnancy;<sup>5</sup> (b) setting health targets using information from probabilistic projections, with an application to contraceptive use;<sup>6</sup> and (c) early childbearing and child marriage.<sup>7</sup> The work on these articles was supported by the Making Family Planning Count 3.0 grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

9. Staff of the Population Division gave presentations on global, regional and national estimates of adolescent fertility at the annual meeting of the Population Association of America, held in New Orleans, United States of America, from 12 to 15 April 2023.

<sup>2</sup> See <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal>.

<sup>3</sup> World Health Organization and World Bank, *Tracking Universal Health Coverage: 2023 Global Monitoring Report* (Geneva, 2023).

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and United Nations Development Programme, *The Paths to Equal: Twin Indices on Women’s Empowerment and Gender Equality* (New York, 2023).

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Marc Bearak and others, “Alignment between desires and outcomes among women wanting to avoid pregnancy: a global comparative study of ‘conditional’ unintended pregnancy rates”, *Studies in Family Planning*, vol. 54, No. 1 (March 2023).

<sup>6</sup> Ann Biddlecom and others, “Setting health targets using information from probabilistic projections: a research brief on an application to contraceptive coverage”, *Population Research and Policy Review*, vol. 42, No. 13 (2023).

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Molitoris and others, “Early childbearing and child marriage: an update”, *Studies in Family Planning*, vol. 54, No. 3 (September 2023).

### III. Health and mortality

10. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs, through its Population and Statistics Divisions, continued to support the Technical Advisory Group on COVID-19 Mortality Assessment, in collaboration with WHO.<sup>8</sup> A primary role of the Technical Advisory Group is to advise and support efforts by WHO and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to assist Member States in obtaining accurate estimates of numbers of deaths attributable to the direct and indirect impacts of the pandemic. The Technical Advisory Group comprises more than 30 experts from the fields of epidemiology, demography, official statistics and other relevant areas, drawn from national statistical offices, ministries of health, academic institutions and elsewhere. The Population Division also participated in monthly meetings of the task force on mortality and life tables of the Reference Group on Health Statistics of WHO.

11. As part of the work of the United Nations Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation, staff of the Population Division co-authored a technical paper entitled *Age-Sex Patterns of Crisis Deaths: Towards a More Standard Mortality Estimation Approach*.<sup>9</sup> In the paper, the Inter-agency Group addresses evidence and knowledge gaps about the impacts of conflicts and natural disasters when these occur in countries without usable death registration data or disrupt normal death registration processes. Based on a comprehensive database of available empirical evidence, the average relative risks of mortality are estimated by age and sex for nine categories of crisis events, including conflict, natural disasters, famine and epidemics. These patterns can be used to estimate mortality levels by age and sex during crises for which detailed information is not available.

### IV. International migration

12. In 2023, the Population Division implemented enhancements to the management of empirical data, documentation and estimation procedures for the next revision of the International Migrant Stock data set, to be released in 2024. The Division produces, on behalf of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, periodic estimates of the number of international migrants residing in all countries and areas, disaggregated by sex, age and origin. The data are widely used to describe levels and trends in the number of international migrants at the national, regional and global levels.

13. The Population Division finalized a report on international migration and sustainable development, to be released in 2024, in which it examines the linkages between international migration and the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. It analyses the latest trends in international migration at the global and regional levels and examines the relationship of international migration with development goals in the areas of poverty and inequality, health, education, gender equality and the empowerment of women, decent work, sustainable cities, climate change, responsible consumption and production and sustainable agriculture, inter alia. It also addresses the global governance of international migration.

14. As the focal point of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs for the United Nations Network on Migration, the Population Division convened, in collaboration with the Network, a technical briefing for Member States on

<sup>8</sup> See [www.un.org/development/desa/pd/events/TAG](http://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/events/TAG).

<sup>9</sup> Available at <https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/UN-IGME-Working-Paper.-Age-sex-Patterns-of-Crisis-Deaths.pdf>.

24 January<sup>10</sup> to provide an update on recent developments in the Network's support for implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and to review the Network's workplan for the period 2022 to 2024, which had incorporated follow-up activities from the Progress Declaration of the first International Migration Review Forum, held in 2022, including new workstreams on (a) developing a limited set of indicators to monitor implementation of the Global Compact; and (b) preparing actionable recommendations on strengthening cooperation on missing migrants and providing humanitarian assistance to migrants in distress.

15. In collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Department of Economic and Social Affairs is co-leading the Network's workstream on developing a limited set of indicators to review progress related to implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, as requested in paragraph 70 of the Progress Declaration of the first International Migration Review Forum. Throughout 2023, the workstream focused on the development of a proposal for the limited set of indicators. Member States, international organizations and other stakeholders were invited to complete a short online questionnaire on the critical elements that should be reflected in the proposal for a limited set of indicators. Five regional consultations with Member States and a wide range of relevant stakeholders were convened in July 2023. On 7 December, the Population Division participated in a technical briefing convened by the Network to present the proposal to Member States. In 2024, the workstream will prioritize activities related to the comprehensive strategy for improving disaggregated migration data. The resulting proposal will inform the biennial report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Global Compact, to be published in 2024.

16. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs, through its Statistics and Population Divisions, led the planning and preparations for the third International Forum on Migration Statistics, held in Santiago from 24 to 26 January 2023. The Forum was co-organized with IOM and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The event highlighted the increasing need for accurate, timely and disaggregated migration data in the context of sustainable development and supported the global monitoring of progress on migration issues in follow-up to both the 2030 Agenda and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. The Forum mobilized expertise from a wide range of disciplines, including statistics, economics, demography, sociology, geospatial science and information technology, to improve the collection and analysis of migration data worldwide.

17. In the lead-up to the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, held in Geneva in December 2023, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs participated in the United Nations Common Pledge 2.0. The aim of the Common Pledge 2.0 is to promote the inclusion of refugees in national plans, budgets, data sets and service delivery systems, recognizing that the inclusion of refugees will be key to ensuring that no one is left behind as the world is accelerating efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. In particular, the Department pledged to: (a) include information on integrating asylum-seekers, refugees and displaced persons in relevant guidance materials and training workshops, encouraging countries and stakeholders to report on these groups during voluntary local and voluntary national reviews in the context of the High-level Political Forum; and (b) draw attention to the plight of these groups during local, national, regional and global reviews of progress of the 2030 Agenda.

18. During the year, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs contributed to statements, background notes and position papers prepared under the aegis of the United Nations Network on Migration, including in the context of the Sustainable Development Goal Summit, the Summit of the Future, briefings by the Coordinator

<sup>10</sup> See [www.un.org/development/desa/pd/events/technical-briefing-un-network-migration](http://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/events/technical-briefing-un-network-migration).

of the Network, complementary implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the global compact on refugees, the International Day of Family Remittances, the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and other events.

## V. Population estimates and projections

19. The preparation of the official United Nations population estimates and projections for all countries and areas of the world is a key part of the work of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, led by the Population Division. The data are used in the calculation of many of the development indicators commonly employed by the United Nations system, including for more than a quarter of the indicators used to monitor progress made in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The estimates and projections are used extensively by United Nations entities and the general public and are widely considered to provide the most authoritative set of demographic data describing population levels and trends around the world.

20. During 2023, the Population Division worked to prepare the 2024 revision of *World Population Prospects*, which is scheduled for release on World Population Day 2024 (11 July). The 2024 revision will contain the latest information available on population size, fertility, mortality and international migration and will offer estimates and projections of various population parameters for 237 countries or areas, geographical regions and other groupings of countries or areas.

21. In 2023, the Population Division continued to improve the estimation methods and analytical workflow to generate the data presented in *World Population Prospects*, especially for countries where vital registration is deficient or lacking, and published technical papers on estimating robust time series of age-specific fertility rates using a Bayesian modelling approach<sup>11</sup> and on modelling the age and sex profiles of net international migration.<sup>12</sup> Work also continued on the further expansion of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs SQL database (DemoData) to integrate the latest round of census, survey and registration data relevant for the preparation of national population estimates and projections (e.g. population by age and sex from censuses or registers and fertility and mortality data from civil registration and vital statistics, as well as from censuses and surveys based on direct and indirect estimation methods, upon data availability). Further work was also conducted to incorporate user feedback for the web-based data dissemination platform (Data Portal) used to provide access to results for all countries for the *World Population Prospects 2022* release and to enable demand-driven data visualization and database queries for demographic data and underlying empirical data.

22. On behalf of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Population Division contributed to: (a) monthly meetings of the Inter-Agency Working Group on interoperability of baseline population, displacement and refugee data,<sup>13</sup> a joint initiative of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, IOM, the Office of the United Nations High

<sup>11</sup> See United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, “Estimating age-specific fertility rate in the World Population Prospects: a Bayesian modelling approach” (UN DESA/POP/2023/TP/No.6).

<sup>12</sup> See United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, “Modelling the age and sex profiles of net international migration” (UN DESA/POP/2023/TP/No.7).

<sup>13</sup> The aim is to strengthen in 2023–2025 the Common Operational Datasets on Population Statistics (COD-PS) availability, quality and usability across the humanitarian system of the United Nations to provide the most up-to-date information on the size, age/sex profile and geographic distribution of a population in an emergency preparedness and humanitarian context.

Commissioner for Refugees and WorldPop, and contributed to the Deep Dive data workshop on Ukraine and Mozambique, held in New York from 17 to 19 January; (b) the Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable Vocabularies working group of the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population–Committee on Data of the International Science Council to promote greater access to, and simpler means of utilizing, demographic data and associated metadata;<sup>14</sup> and (c) the second workstream of the Friends of the Chair group on social and demographic statistics of the Statistical Commission to review national approaches and to identify elements for a potential overarching conceptual framework for social and demographic statistics. The Department also organized two expert group meetings for the fourth revision of the Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, virtually from 23 to 25 May 2023 and in person from 13 to 15 December 2023, led by the Statistics Division with support from the Population Division.<sup>15</sup>

23. Staff from the Population Division contributed expertise on demographic trends and methods of population estimation and projection on several occasions, including: (a) a seminar on estimation challenges and analytical strategies to reconstruct demographic levels and trends since 1950 for 237 countries/areas, held on 23 January at the Population Studies Center of the University of Pennsylvania; (b) a virtual session of the World Data Forum 2023 entitled “Integrating population, displacement and geospatial data in humanitarian emergencies: challenges, opportunities and lessons” in Hangzhou, China, on 27 April; (c) a session on addressing climate change in population projections organized by the Swiss Federal Statistical Office at the sixty-fourth World Statistical Congress of the International Statistical Institute, held in Ottawa on 18 July; (d) a round table and symposium on Human and Planetary Health organized by the Center for Health Data Science of the School of Global Public Health at New York University, held on 14 and 15 September; (e) two virtual sessions on population projections for socioeconomic, environmental and climate change analysis at the Third Asian Population Forum, organized by the Asian Demographic Research Institute and held on 31 October and 1 November at Shanghai University, China; (f) a virtual seminar on data from the United Nations to study Mediterranean populations organized by the university data platforms of the PROGEDO network from Aix-Marseille University, France, on 12 December; and (g) a workshop convened by the European Commission in Brussels on 13 December on the results of the *Global Demography Expert Survey on Drivers and Consequences of Demographic Change*,<sup>16</sup> which the Division has jointly implemented with the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission and the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis.

## VI. Urbanization and spatial distribution

24. In 2023, the Population Division participated in several technical meetings on the new “degree of urbanization” concept for measuring urbanization in a more internationally comparable manner and on new methods for forecasting urbanization. The Division also participated virtually in the expert group meeting on projections of built-up areas, people and urbanization organized from 21 to 22 June by the European Commission. Following endorsement of the new degree of urbanization measure by the Statistical Commission in 2020, the Division has been formulating plans to incorporate the new statistical concept as a complement to national definitions of urban residence in the next revision of the *World Urbanization Prospects in 2025*.

<sup>14</sup> See <https://iussp.org/en/iussp-codata-fair-vocabularies-working-group>.

<sup>15</sup> See <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/meetings/2023/egm-20231213/>.

<sup>16</sup> Available at <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/769eba25-6bcf-11ee-9220-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.



## VII. Population ageing, household composition and living arrangements

25. The Population Division prepared the report *World Population Ageing 2023: Challenges and Opportunities of Population Ageing in the Least Developed Countries*.<sup>17</sup> The report examines levels and trends of population ageing in the least developed countries and discusses the challenges and opportunities of harnessing the demographic dividend, an opportunity to increase economic growth and development provided by the rising share of the working-age population. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs will issue a policy brief on population ageing in 2024, drawing on the main findings of the report.

26. The Population Division published a technical paper<sup>18</sup> that provides methodological details for the interactive Database on Older Persons in Collective Living Quarters, a new data set that was launched in 2022. In addition, the Population Division and the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs are working together to enhance dissemination of the data sets on living arrangements of older persons through the Gender Data Hub.<sup>19</sup>

27. The Population Division, on behalf of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, also participated in activities of the United Nations Inter-Agency Group on Ageing, a network<sup>20</sup> of entities of the United Nations system that exchange information on and integrate ageing into their programmes of work on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The focus of the Group's work is to support the implementation of General Assembly resolution 75/131 on the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030). The Division also continued to support the WHO Technical Advisory Group for Measurement, Monitoring and Evaluation of the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing.

28. The Population Division made several presentations in the context of international meetings on population ageing, including a workshop on ageing and health in sub-Saharan Africa organized by Makerere University, Kampala (Uganda) from 20 to 22 February and a keynote address at the opening of the eighth Golden Age Expo and Summit, organized by the Golden Age Foundation in Hong Kong, China, from 11 to 13 August. Staff also contributed one lecture session on global trends in population ageing to the Columbia Journalism School and the Columbia Aging Center.

## VIII. Population and development

29. The Population Division prepared the report *Population Prospects of Countries in Special Situations: Tracking Demographic Changes among the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States*.<sup>21</sup> The report provides an overview of current and future population trends in the three groups of countries in special situations (least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States) and an analysis of the opportunities and challenges that these demographic trends present for achieving

<sup>17</sup> Available at [www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/undesapd\\_2024\\_wpa2023-report.pdf](http://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/undesapd_2024_wpa2023-report.pdf).

<sup>18</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "United Nations database on older persons living in collective living arrangements" (UN DESA/POP/2023/TP/No.8).

<sup>19</sup> See <https://gender-data-hub-2-undesahub.arcgis.com/pages/1a6de3fc6e4e4803b368750324c58797>.

<sup>20</sup> The Inter-Agency Group on Ageing was formalized in 2023, see [A/78/177](https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/documents/2024/Jan/report-countries-special-situations_web_draft.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> Available at [www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/documents/2024/Jan/report-countries-special-situations\\_web\\_draft.pdf](http://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/documents/2024/Jan/report-countries-special-situations_web_draft.pdf).



sustainable development. The report is focused on differences and similarities between regional subgroups of the three categories of countries, highlighting levels and trends in population size and distribution, age structure, mortality, fertility and international migration, including population projections to 2050. The report also discusses the implications of population dynamics for achieving selected Sustainable Development Goals and targets.

## IX. Support for intergovernmental processes

30. The Population Division, on behalf of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, supported the organization of the fifty-sixth session of the Commission on Population and Development, which was held at United Nations Headquarters from 10 to 14 April 2023. The special theme of the session was “Population, education and sustainable development”. The Division supported the work of the Chair and the Bureau, including by organizing briefings of the Chair and convening meetings of the Bureau. The Division assisted the Bureau in organizing plenary meetings by inviting high-level officials for the opening, organizing interactive panel discussions and facilitating the participation of panellists. The Division also supported the co-facilitators during informal consultations on draft proposals, including a resolution on the special theme.

31. In response to General Assembly resolution [72/305](#) on review of the implementation of General Assembly resolution [68/1](#) on the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council and Council resolution [2016/25](#) on future organization and methods of work of the Commission on Population and Development, the Population Division supported the Bureau by holding extensive consultations with Member States and other stakeholders, promoting transparency through systematic information-sharing, ensuring the engagement of civil society and United Nations entities with relevant expertise and allocating ample time for informal consultations. During the annual session, multi-stakeholder panels and expert discussions replaced the traditional presentation of reports by the Secretary-General.

32. In response to requests from Member States for events related to the theme of the annual session throughout the year, the Population Division organized an informal substantive briefing by the Chair of the Commission on Population and Development on 12 December, which was attended by approximately 85 delegates and staff from the United Nations, UNFPA and other United Nations entities.<sup>22</sup> The briefing featured presentations on substantive matters by representatives of the Population Division and of UNFPA and by an expert from the Population Reference Bureau. Member States posed questions to the panellists and shared their ideas and expectations for the upcoming session of the Commission, as well as for the anticipated commemorative event at the General Assembly on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, pursuant to decision 2022/332 of the Economic and Social Council.

### A. Reports of the Secretary-General

33. On behalf of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Population Division prepared the report of the Secretary-General on the theme of the fifty-sixth session of the Commission, “Population, education and sustainable development” ([E/CN.9/2023/2](#)). The report examined the dynamics of the school-age population in different regions of the world, the relationship between education and the three

<sup>22</sup> See [www.un.org/development/desa/pd/events/briefing-substantive-preparations-CPD57](http://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/events/briefing-substantive-preparations-CPD57).

components of population change, namely fertility, mortality and migration, and the connections with gender equality and the empowerment of women, human capital formation, economic growth and environmental sustainability. The discussion highlighted linkages between demographic variables and trends and access to quality education at all levels, including early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary education and lifelong learning.

## **B. Expert group meetings**

34. To inform the preparation of the fifty-seventh session of the Commission, on 19 and 20 July the Population Division convened a hybrid expert group meeting on assessing the status of implementation of the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action and its contribution to the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda during the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development.<sup>23</sup> The meeting included more than 25 invited experts from research institutions, United Nations system entities including UNFPA and the World Bank, and OECD, as well as observers from Member States, civil society and the United Nations system. The meeting examined progress and gaps in implementing selected goals and objectives set out in the Programme of Action and took stock of the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals which are of particular relevance to its implementation. Participants assessed the implications of demographic trends for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and how the 2024 Summit of the Future could promote global solidarity for future generations. The discussions concluded with recommendations on policy priorities for population and development over the next few decades.

## **C. Support for the General Assembly**

35. Pursuant to Economic and Social Council decision 2022/332, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs supported the Chair and the Bureau of the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on Population and Development in preparing for a commemorative event on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development to be convened by the General Assembly during 2024.

## **D. Monitoring of internationally agreed development goals**

36. During 2023, the Population Division contributed to the work of the Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation, whose task is to monitor progress made towards the achievement of target 3.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals, on ending preventable deaths of newborns and children under 5 years of age. The Group is led by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and also includes WHO, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (represented by the Population Division) and the World Bank. The Division provided information to update a database maintained by UNICEF and collaborated in the preparation of a report entitled *Levels and Trends in Child Mortality*, to be released in 2024.

37. In addition, the Population Division continued to participate, on behalf of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, in the Maternal Mortality Estimation Inter-Agency Group, which is responsible for monitoring progress in reducing maternal mortality, as called for in target 3.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals.

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<sup>23</sup> See [www.un.org/development/desa/pd/events/EGM-CPD57](http://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/events/EGM-CPD57).

The Group is led by WHO, with the participation of UNICEF, UNFPA, the World Bank and the Department (represented by the Population Division). The Division provides key inputs for the estimation process, including country-level estimates of the number of women of reproductive age, the total fertility rate and the number of live births. The report on maternal mortality was released in February 2023.

38. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs prepared the report of the Secretary-General on global progress in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2023, which include its estimates of the proportion of women of reproductive age (15–49 years) who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods of contraception (Goal indicator 3.7.1) and of birth rates for girls aged 10–14 years or 15–19 years (Goal indicator 3.7.2).<sup>24</sup> These estimates were included in the Department’s update of the Global Sustainable Development Goal Indicators Database.<sup>25</sup>

## X. Dissemination of population information and data

39. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs continued to strengthen its communications and outreach activities on population, in close collaboration with the Department of Global Communications. In line with the strategic communication framework of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Population Division prepared key messages, media advisories, press releases and social media packages, including digital cards, infographics, tweets and Facebook posts to promote major publications and intergovernmental events on population.

40. The new website of the Population Division ([www.un.org/development/desa/pd](http://www.un.org/development/desa/pd)) became fully operational in 2023. The new website, based on a Drupal platform, allows for easier access from mobile devices, reduces the need for posting content in multiple locations, facilitates content management by non-technical staff and is consistent with the visual ecosystem of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. It showcases the main activities and outputs of the Division in easily identifiable sections.

41. According to information obtained through Google Analytics, the websites maintained by the Population Division had nearly 3.8 million page views in 2023. Several publications prepared by the Division, including one or more editions of the *World Population Prospects*, the *International Migration Report*, *World Urbanization Prospects* and *World Cities*, continued to rank among the most accessed publications of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, according to the Department’s download statistics.

42. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs worked closely with UNFPA and the Department of Global Communications in organizing outreach activities in the context of the fifty-sixth session of the Commission on Population and Development.

43. Department of Economic and Social Affairs policy brief No. 153, “India overtakes China as the world’s most populous country”, was launched during a press briefing held at the United Nations in New York on 24 April. In the policy brief, the Department observes that the population trends in both countries are determined largely by fertility levels and that population policies in both countries had different impacts. The Department calls on both countries to prepare for growing numbers of older persons and to take into account future population trends in national

<sup>24</sup> *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023: Special Edition – Towards a Rescue Plan for People and Planet* (United Nations publication, 2023).

<sup>25</sup> See <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal..>

development planning. The launch was widely covered by major networks and news outlets, with particularly strong coverage in India and China.

44. In connection with the Commission on Population and Development, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs issued policy brief No. 152, “Population, education and sustainable development: interlinkages and select policy implications”. In the brief, the Department stressed that the demographic transition brings opportunities to boost the human capital of young people and adults alike; that completion of at least secondary education is key to preventing child marriage and early childbearing; that despite significant progress in reducing the gender gap in school enrolment, much remains to be done to improve completion, the quality of education and to translate education gains into women’s access to decent jobs; and that access to education and recognition of credentials are key to migrant integration and to maximizing the development benefits of migration. The Department also issued a fact sheet containing 10 key findings from the report of the Secretary-General on population, education and sustainable development.

45. Throughout the year, the Population Division responded to a large number of requests for population information and data from Governments, international organizations, civil society, the media, the research community, the private sector and the general public.

## **XI. Technical cooperation**

46. As part of its contribution to the support provided by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to the resident coordinator system and the United Nations country teams, the Population Division provided input and reviewed more than a dozen common country assessment reports, United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework proposals and other documents such as methodology notes.

47. More than 100 participants from 47 countries attended the “Building Sustainable Generational Economies” conference, held at the University of Paris-Dauphine from 14 to 17 February. This was the fourteenth Global Meeting of the National Transfer Accounts Network, which brought together government officials from national statistical offices and planning ministries and academic researchers focused on measuring and understanding the gendered and generational economy. Staff from the Department of Economic and Social Affairs provided workshop trainings on: (a) measuring the generational economy using the Department’s National Transfer Accounts Manual to understand how resources are consumed, produced and transferred between generations; (b) measuring the gendered economy using the Department’s National Time Transfer Account Manual to understand how resources are consumed, produced and transferred between men and women; and (c) using population-based measures of inequality in National Accounts to move “beyond gross domestic product (GDP)” as a core measure of economic well-being. Staff from the Department also participated in the opening day plenary panel, presenting a global perspective on national transfer accounts and public policy, highlighting the role and work of the United Nations. Lastly, a planning meeting was held to discuss timelines and deliverables with the eight pilot countries (Colombia, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Maldives, Uruguay and Viet Nam) participating in the joint Development Account project on inclusive and sustainable economic growth in a society for all ages of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific-Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

48. At the request of the Department of Statistics Malaysia, the Population Division held a capacity-building workshop from 15 to 21 March in Putrajaya, Malaysia, to train government officials from the Department of Statistics Malaysia, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Economics in the methodology for the estimation of national transfer accounts. This system of demographic-economic accounting helps Governments plan for population ageing and provide the necessary evidence base for evaluating policies aimed at ensuring economic security for older persons, investing sufficiently in the human capital of youth, taking advantage of the emergence of the “silver economy” (older workers and older consumers) and promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth. Staff of the Population Division also met with the United Nations country team and the UNFPA country office in Malaysia and were briefed on their multi-year capacity-building programme supporting the Government of Malaysia in developing statistical systems to assess the economic impacts of population ageing – including a focus on gender and inequality.

49. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs organized a capacity-building workshop, jointly with the UNFPA country office in China, to train government staff and academic researchers in the estimation and use of national transfer accounts for China, held in Beijing from 26 July to 1 August. The workshop on “National transfer accounts initiative for China” was co-sponsored by the UNFPA country office in China as part of a cooperative initiative of UNFPA and the National Development and Reform Commission of China, which aims to strengthen the country’s policy planning in the field of population and development, especially in the area of population ageing, by exploring innovative methods. Thirty-nine participants were trained from the Academy of Macroeconomic Research of China, the National Bureau of Statistics, the China Research Center on Aging, the China Population and Development Research Center, the Ministry of Agricultural and Rural Affairs and academic researchers from national universities.

50. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs, in collaboration with the Asia-Pacific regional office of UNFPA and the United States Census Bureau, held a capacity-building workshop from 16 to 20 October in Bangkok, to train government officials from the region in population estimation and projection. Participants included 31 officials from national statistical offices and planning ministries from Bangladesh, Indonesia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Timor-Leste. As a result of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, census operations were disrupted in most countries of the region where they were due to take place in 2020 or 2021. Following delayed censuses, many countries are now focusing on post-enumeration activities, including the preparation of population projections. Countries of the Asia-Pacific region are currently experiencing substantial demographic shifts, and population ageing is a paramount concern for many Governments. In this context, population projections are an essential tool for understanding future population age structures and for guiding potential policy responses.

51. Staff from the Population Division provided virtual training in the probabilistic approach to population projections during two regional capacity-building workshops organized by UNFPA regional offices, held from 13 to 18 November. The workshop for French-speaking participants was held in Saly, Senegal, with 16 countries represented: Benin, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Comoros, Côte d’Ivoire, Gabon, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Equatorial Guinea, Mali, Niger, Central Africa Republic, Chad, Republic of the Congo, Senegal and Togo. The workshop for English-speaking participants was held in Johannesburg, South Africa, with 10 countries represented: Botswana, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritius, Nigeria, Seychelles, South Africa, the

United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia. The topics covered included: scenario approaches versus probabilistic approaches to forecasting populations; the methodology used by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in producing global probabilistic projections; and the potential sources of differences between national projections and those of the United Nations.

52. At the request of the Planning Institute of Jamaica, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs organized, in collaboration with the UNFPA Subregional Office for the Caribbean in Jamaica, and the UNFPA Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, a capacity-building workshop on the estimation of national transfer accounts for Jamaica, held in Kingston from 4 to 8 December. Staff from the Planning Institute of Jamaica constructed preliminary estimates of national transfer accounts using survey data from the *Jamaica Survey of Living Conditions 2019*, administrative records and national accounts. These estimates were used to assess the likely impact of population ageing on economic growth and provide long-run forecasts of government expenditures for pensions, health care and education.

53. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs organized the fifth Beyond GDP sprint meeting of the United Nations Network of Economic Statisticians, which was held virtually on 14 September and attended by 165 participants from national statistics offices, as well as regional and international organizations. Participants discussed the need for statistical systems to move “beyond GDP” and, specifically, to move “beyond averages” to provide the evidence base for building inclusive and sustainable societies. The discussions were focused on the synergies among the different distributional frameworks used for measuring economic inequality and the disaggregation of national accounts by sociodemographic group.

54. Concerning the special demographic dynamics in countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, where population trends are highly affected by foreign labour migration, the Population Division, on behalf of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, convened technical meetings to explain the methods used to prepare the United Nations population estimates and projections and to promote data and knowledge-sharing. In collaboration with the Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab Countries of the Gulf, the Division organized a virtual technical workshop from 11 to 13 December, which was attended by approximately 40 representatives of the national statistical offices of Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. To address country-specific issues related to population data and estimation, the Division held bilateral meetings, by request, with the Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Centre, United Arab Emirates, in Dubai from 6 to 8 November, and with the General Authority for Statistics, Saudi Arabia, in New York on 18 July and virtually on 21 December.



## Annex

### **Publications, expert group meetings and other materials prepared or events organized by the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (1 January–31 December 2023)**

#### **Expert group meetings**

Expert group meeting on assessing the status of implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and its contribution to the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda during the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development, hybrid meeting, New York, 19 and 20 July 2023

#### **Capacity-development workshops**

Global training workshop on building sustainable generational economies, Paris, 14–17 February 2023

National training workshop on estimation of national transfer accounts for Malaysia, Putrajaya, Malaysia, 15–21 March 2023

National training workshop on estimation of national transfer accounts for China, Beijing, 26 July–1 August 2023

Asia-Pacific regional training workshop on population projections, Bangkok, 16–20 October 2023

Africa regional training workshops on population projections, Saly, Senegal, and Johannesburg, South Africa, 13–18 November 2023

National training workshop on estimation of national transfer accounts for Jamaica, 4–8 December 2023

#### **Reports of the Secretary-General and other parliamentary documents**

Report of the Secretary-General on population, education and sustainable development ([E/CN.9/2023/2](#))

Report of the Secretary-General on programme implementation and progress of work in the field of population in 2022: Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs ([E/CN.9/2023/5](#))

#### **Publications**

*World Population Ageing 2023: Challenges and Opportunities of Population Ageing in the Least Developed Countries* (UN DESA/POP/2023/TR/No.5)

*Population Prospects of Countries in Special Situations: Tracking Demographic Change among the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States* (UN DESA/POP/2023/TR/No.6)

#### **Technical papers**

“United Nations database on older persons living in collective living quarters” (UN DESA/POP/2023/TP/No.8)

“Modelling the age and sex profiles of net international migration” (UN DESA/POP/2023/TP/No.7)

“Estimating age-specific fertility rate in the World Population Prospects: a Bayesian modelling approach” (UN DESA/POP/2023/TP/No.6)

**Policy briefs and fact sheets**

“Population, education and sustainable development: interlinkages and select policy implications”, policy brief No. 152

“India overtakes China as the world’s most populous country”, policy brief No. 153

“Population, education and sustainable development: ten key messages”

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