



"We assert today that the population dimension is a key element of sustainable development which rests on social, economic and environmental pillars and also considers the impact of development on the opportunities of future generations. It is therefore indispensable to reconcile the needs of all groups within society, young and old, men and women and people with special needs". **Andrey Vasilyev, UNECE, Deputy Executive Secretary.**



UNECE Regional Conference enabling choices: Population Priorities for the 21st Century Geneva

Current population changes are an opportunity, not a threat, if coupled with smart policies – UN-hosted regional conference

Current population dynamics in Europe, North America and Central Asia must be seen as an opportunity, not a threat, senior officials of UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, and the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) said at the opening of the high-level ICPD regional review conference "Enabling Choices: Population Priorities for the 21st Century". The Conference, which gathered more than 300 participants, including 43 country delegations, 16 youth delegates as well as participants from NGOs and academia, was the culmination of a regional review of implementation of the Programme of Action adopted by the landmark International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo in 1994. This process included an extensive survey conducted by UNECE among its member States, an academic analysis provided by the Wittgenstein Centre (Vienna), as well as three meetings with civil society, experts, youth representatives and parliamentarians from across the region. The conference sought to build consensus and reinforce commitments to the ICPD Programme of Action.

Population changes

People in the UNECE region live longer, healthier lives, and have higher levels of education than past generations. Many countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia have struggled with the consequences of often painful transition processes after the collapse of communism. But following a sharp decline in the 1990s, key indicators such as life expectancy and fertility have stabilized and even show an upward trend again, according to new data and analysis presented at the conference. The region's total population amounted to 1.24 billion people in 2010, up from 1.18 billion in 2000.

Fertility levels remain low in most countries of the region, and as a result of increasing longevity and low birth rates, populations are ageing. The number of people aged 65 years and above has increased to 14%, or 174.5 million. At the same time, societies are becoming more diverse due to increasingly complex migration patterns and the changing nature of families, gender relations and individual life choices.

Although often presented as threats in the public discourse, these dynamics can have positive effects for societies if governments anticipate changes and respond in a timely and comprehensive manner, experts agreed in a series of preparatory meetings in the run-up to the conference.

Policy achievements and gaps: outcomes of the ICPD Beyond 2014 Survey in the UNECE region

Two decades after the landmark International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) adopted a Programme of Action in Cairo in 1994, countries now have a variety of policies and programmes in place that go beyond traditional population policies to include social and welfare policies.

In many cases, these policies cover vulnerable groups such as youth, the aged, the disabled and women, according to the survey of the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action conducted among UNECE Member States. The UNECE Regional Report presented at the Conference also identifies a number of gaps that require further policy attention. These include:

- Gender and family policies need to facilitate the reconciliation of both paid work and unpaid family responsibilities
- Legal frameworks need to be better adapted to the emergence of non-traditional family formations
- More attention is needed to the support of a growing number of single-parent families,



"We welcome with extreme pleasure this chair's summary and look forward to using it in our further advocacy as youth delegates in the ICPD beyond 2014 and post-2015 development agendas moving forward". Youth delegation.



"These two days showed that UNECE and UNFPA are excellent partners. We have complementary roles and this gives us the opportunity to build synergies and to draw on each other's strengths". Werner Haug, Director, UNFPA Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regional Office.



and the rights related to fatherhood

- Persons with disabilities, the poor, migrants and older persons need better access to sexual and reproductive health services
- Sexual and reproductive health services need to be better integrated with the primary health care systems

The review showed that involving civil society, changing mindsets and working together across borders is key for implementing the ICPD agenda. But it also made clear that progress is not linear: the current financial and economic crisis created new vulnerabilities and raised inequalities that governments need to address.

Conference information and the ICPD Beyond 2014 process, as well as background documents: <http://www.unece.org/icpd-2014/unece-regional-conference.html>
Watch the photo gallery on flickr: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/98046700@N04/sets/72157634424409488/>

Chair's Summary

Urs Schmid, Chair and representative of the host country of the conference, Switzerland, summarized the main outcomes of the conference in his Chair's summary which is also the main outcome document of the Conference. He appreciated the fact that the conference had brought out a set of recommendations, ideas and lessons learnt that would allow to effectively respond to the challenges of population dynamics.

According to him, there was a basic agreement about the need to respect the rights of individuals, putting them at the centre of development processes. Gender equality should be advanced and attention be given to vulnerable groups and families. The importance of promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights and of providing access to comprehensive sexuality education was underlined, allowing individuals to take free, informed and responsible decisions without coercion.

Investing in human capital was considered key for achieving sustainable development. This should include building capacities of adolescents and youth, allowing them to meaningfully participate in formulating policies. There should be a good understanding of human rights-based, non-discriminatory approaches, protecting and fulfilling rights of migrants, victims of trafficking, and people living with HIV, coupled with zero tolerance for gender-based violence.

The chair also emphasized the importance of partnerships, especially with civil society and youth, strengthening also the role of communities. Governments should be accountable and be guided by the rule of law. The need of data collection, including on vulnerable and marginalized groups was emphasized in their importance as a basis for policy-making. ■

Full document: http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/pau/icpd/Conference/Other_documents/Chair-s-Summary.pdf

World Population Day 2013

The UNECE Regional Conference comes on the eve of World Population Day which is marked annually on 11 July. This year, the day focusses on adolescent pregnancy. Still, far too often, teenage pregnancies jeopardize the rights, health, education and potential of adolescent girls.

In the UNECE region, 4.7% of all live births have been to mothers aged under 20 in 2010, down from 7.3% in 2000. However, there is a large variety within the region. In Eastern Europe and the Caucasus as much as 8.4% of live births were to mothers under 20 compared to 3.1% in the EU15.

As acknowledged in the Chair's summary, the main outcome document of the UNECE Regional Conference, adolescents and youth must be provided with age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education to develop the knowledge and skills they need to protect their health throughout their lives. However, education and information are not enough. Good quality reproductive health services must also be readily available in order for adolescents to make informed choices and be healthy. ■

Figures: http://eeca.unfpa.org/webdav/site/eeca/shared/documents/ICPD-Geneva/Population_Trends_and_Policies_in_the_UNECE_Region_WEB.pdf
World Population Day: <http://www.unfpa.org/public/home/news/pid/14426>