



Opening Remarks

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UNECE/UNFPA Regional Conference ICPD+25

“Enabling choices: Population dynamics and sustainable development”

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1-2 October 2018

Geneva

Excellency Mrs Irena Kostevich, Minister of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Belarus

Excellency Ambassador Rosemary McCarney, Permanent Representative of Canada to the UN in Geneva

Excellency Ambassador Deyana Kostadinova, Permanent Representative of Bulgaria to the UN in Geneva

Dr. Lidia Bratanova, Director of the Statistical Division of the Economic Commission of Europe (UNECE),

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Civil society partners

Young people

Colleagues and Friends

It is a great pleasure to welcome you today, together with the UN Economic Commission for Europe – to this important ICPD+25 regional conference – “Enabling choices: Population dynamics and sustainable development”.

The International Conference on Population and Development was historic. It was in Cairo 25 years ago that many of you -- part of the 179 Member States that endorsed the ICPD Programme of Action -- agreed to shift the population debate from one of human numbers to one of human rights; to the recognition that investing in individual capabilities, dignity and human rights is the foundation of sustainable development.

I am very excited by the engagement –almost 300 delegates from Government, civil society, youth and older persons, people of all abilities - gathering together to discuss some of our regions most pressing issues in the area of population and development.

Your ICPD agenda remains as relevant today as it was 25 years ago.

And with your guidance and commitment, the world moved into the SDG era in 2015, and ICPD was integrated into the broader, extraordinary and transformative agenda.

Over the next two days, we have an historic opportunity to celebrate our progress on the implementation of the ICPD in the ECE region in the new SDG era; to share experiences and to redouble our efforts to reach those who are still left behind.

I am also happy to report the strong engagement of stakeholders throughout the regional ICPD+25 review process. Several consultations were held throughout the year focusing on youth, population dynamics and sexual and reproductive health. This weekend, both a youth and civil society consultation meetings were held for which I look forward to hearing the results later today.

This region’s deliberations are vital not only for the countries assembled here but for the entire world. The demographic transformations we are experiencing in the ECE region are very likely to be faced by every country in the decades to come.

Many are relying on you to find approaches that address the challenges we face, while ensure the dignity and rights of all people.

Progress and challenges

Later today, you will hear in detail about the powerful review report that UNECE and UNFPA have jointly produced, using available national and regional data.

Across this region there have been great gains in the 25 years of the Programme of Action. We are closer to achieving our goal of ensuring that every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and all young people fulfill their potential.

More women have access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, empowering them to make choices about their bodies, their lives and their families.

Young people benefit from better access to education and are more involved in decisions affecting their futures.

However, the journey is far from complete, the prospects for the 10 year old girl far from certain. As the review report shows, too many people are still left behind and are not able to contribute their full potential to our societies.

Discrimination and stigma against any, holds all of us back. Social exclusion of vulnerable groups remains a challenge. By excluding some, we reduce the power of all.

Finally, while governments of this region have made progress in facilitating the civic participation of young people, women and other groups, more can be done to ensure meaningful engagement in decision-making.

Demographic transformation

The ECE region is at the forefront of a global demographic transformation, which has significant implications for sustainable development, as well as individual health, rights and wellbeing.

But population trends in Europe and Central Asia are very diverse. In some parts of the region, particularly Central Asia, fertility rates are high, and populations are still young.

All around the region, the situation of young people, their prospects and their voices must be at the very center of our efforts. Providing these younger generations with health care, education and decent jobs throughout their working life can result in a demographic dividend, a potential economic benefit resulting from wise investments.

However, other parts of the region are in a very different situation.

In large parts of Europe, population dynamics are characterized by late childbearing, low fertility levels and increasing life expectancy of women and men. This has led to a rapid increase in the number and proportion of older persons throughout Europe.

Population ageing is first and foremost an amazing success story and a reason to celebrate! Today's older people are fitter, healthier and with greater capacities than older generations before them. 60 is the new 50!

However, there is real anxiety about the effects of ageing populations on labour markets and economic growth, as well as the increasing cost associated with pensions and health care systems.

Yet, what makes the region so unique is that in some countries, ageing is occurring in concert with outmigration of young people, particularly of young working age people, as well as below

replacement fertility – so that populations in this region are not only ageing, but they are also shrinking.

The 10 countries with the most rapidly declining populations are all in Europe. You will know the details later today.

The challenges of population decline, intensive migration, and population ageing have a tremendous impact on the economies and societies of many countries of the region and on their ability to achieve the ICPD Programme of Action and the Sustainable Development Goals.

In these diverse and dynamic contexts, your successes, your challenges, and the hard lessons you have learned about the core themes of the Chair's Summary are essential for realizing the aspirations and inspiration of the sustainable development goals.

Rights and choices for all

Honorable delegates,

These challenges reveal a long journey ahead of us and all of us have a responsibility to fulfill our commitments.

This conference is once again part of a global process. Each region of the world is reviewing their progress since their 2013 regional conference on population and development. Next year, 25 years after Cairo, the Commission on Population and Development will conduct a full review of the ICPD Programme of Action and its contribution to the 2030 Agenda, which will inform the first full review of the 2030 Agenda in the UN General Assembly.

Your leadership in this region as Member States, civil society organizations, academia and development partners has been critical to our collective progress since Cairo and since 2013 and it will be no less so as we head for 2030. .

I know that this region will shine brightly on the global stage because of your actions and the outcomes of this conference.

Alongside our sister agencies, UNFPA stands ready to support you ensure the rights, choices and progress for all.

Thank you.