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United Nations  
New York, 2015

# DESA

The Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat is a vital interface between global policies in the economic, social and environmental spheres and national action. The Department works in three main interlinked areas: (i) it compiles, generates and analyses a wide range of economic, social and environmental data and information on which Member States of the United Nations draw to review common problems and take stock of policy options; (ii) it facilitates the negotiations of Member States in many intergovernmental bodies on joint courses of action to address ongoing or emerging global challenges; and (iii) it advises interested Governments on ways and means of translating policy frameworks developed in United Nations conferences and summits into programmes at the country level and, through technical assistance, helps build national capacities.

## Note

The designations employed in this report and the material presented in it do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. The term "country" as used in the text of this report also refers, as appropriate, to territories or areas. The designations "developed", "developing" and "least developed" countries, areas or regions are intended for statistical convenience and do not necessarily express a judgement about the stage reached by a particular country or area in the developing process.

## PREFACE

The Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) of the United Nations Secretariat serves the Commission on Population and Development of the Economic and Social Council, which meets every year to consider a special theme based on the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). The Commission's theme for 2015 is "Realizing the future we want: integrating populat

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## 1. BACKGROUND AND SCOPE OF MEETING

During the next 15 years, the period covered by the post-2015 United Nations development agenda, demographic trends will have varied and profound implications on our ability to achieve sustainable development, suggesting the potential for large returns to investment in dedicated research on population and development aimed at informing innovative and evidence-based policies.

In order to review gaps and future priorities in demographic research to support the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda, the Population Division convened an expert group meeting on “The post-2015 era: Implications for the global research agenda on population and development” at the United Nations in New York on 10 April 2015. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss research priorities on population and development that merit global attention over the next 15 years. In identifying key knowledge gaps in future demographic trends and their implications for global sustainable development, the results of the meeting were intended to assist the international community in identifying a global, policy-relevant research agenda on population and development.

6/10/2015 10:07:00 AM Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland - 1000 Lakeside Blvd, Cleveland, OH 44115-3999

## 2. SUMMARY OF SESSIONS

### A. OPENING OF THE MEETING AND KEYNOTE ADDRESS

The meeting was opened by the Director of the Population Division, Mr. John Wilmoth. After welcoming all participants, Mr. Wilmoth highlighted the importance of population-related issues in the post-2015 development agenda. He then explained how the expert group meeting would contribute to this agenda as well as to the forthcoming session of the Commission on Population and Development, which would be held the following week.

Mr. Jeffrey Sachs (Columbia University) gave the keynote address. He highlighted six demographic challenges for achieving the sustainable development goals (SDGs), namely (1) rapid population growth in sub-Saharan Africa, with questions about the pace of fertility decline and its implications; (2) population ageing in high- and middle-income countries and the implications for fiscal policy; (3) large-scale environmental disruptions and the possibility of increased conflict and environmentally-induced migration; (4) rapid urbanization and the need for urban trend analyses to identify urban “hotspots”; (5) technology and large-scale labour market disruption and the future of work and leisure, including the effect of artificial intelligence; and (6) international migration and its impact on both individuals and countries.

During the discussion, participants raised the need for better data. Mr. Sachs suggested that countries should develop additional data sources, as that large household surveys were unable to provide sufficient or frequent enough data for monitoring the proposed targets and goals of the SDGs. The lack of data on international migration flows between developing countries was highlighted. On a different point, Mr. Sachs emphasised that the demographic dividend could only be reaped with a relative increase in the working-age population, not just a large youth population, implying that, in some countries, a faster fertility decline would be needed to achieve this demographic bonus.

### B. CHANGING AGE STRUCTURES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS







universal; and (5) continued population growth poses a challenge to achieving full coverage of reproductive health services.

Participants observed that the relationship between normative change and reproductive health is not well understood. The need for a framework for understanding sexual and reproductive decisions and behaviours across the life course was highlighted, including a wider array of factors than has traditionally been the case, such as self-efficacy or mental health. Other priorities for research were on the implementation and impact of family planning programmes, health interventions and health systems on reproductive health outcomes and normative change. From strategic decision-making, information is also needed at the health service delivery point or community level on how the access, type of services made available, and quality of service delivery influences the use of reproductive health services. Participants also noted a priority for evidence at the macro-level, including improvements in population well-being and economic returns as a result of investments in reproductive health. They also discussed effective responses to reduce adolescent and unintended fertility as well as those to increase fertility (where actual fertility is lower than wanted fertility).

In order to tackle these knowledge gaps, strategic investments should be made to improve data collection and analysis, including large-scale longitudinal surveys, randomized control trials, carefully-designed impact evaluations, disaggregated data, and rapid response systems of data collection. It is also necessary to engage more with policymakers, including those from substantive areas apart from health, and to ensure that Governments have a greater understanding and ownership of the relevant issues. Participants provided examples of ways that research priorities could be implemented, including South-South cooperation, capacity building, improved training in demography, better ways of sharing information, collaborating across disciplines, and working collectively, including through virtual communities. The research community was advised to increase its engagement with advocates, civil society and programme managers. Countries should also be encouraged to make relevant research data available.

## F. INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

The presentation by the Population Division highlighted a number of key trends in international migration: (1) the number of international migrants has increased worldwide; (2) while Asia and Europe host the largest number of international migrants, Asia added more international migrants than any other region since 2000; (3) most international migration occurs within regions although these patterns are

migration data, for redoubling efforts to collect, disseminate and analyse reliable, comparable and timely data and for strengthening the relevance of existing quantitative and qualitative information. Additional suggestions included promoting greater cooperation among various stakeholders, including national statistical offices, line ministries, civil society, academia and the private sector, strengthening academic networks, especially in the global South, establishing a dedicated fund for training, surveys and technical cooperation.

## G. SUSTAINABLE URBANIZATION

The Population Division highlighted a number of key trends including: (1) the urban population is projected to increase by 1.1 billion people by 2030; (2) most of this increase will be concentrated in a few countries; (3) the fastest growing cities are located in Africa and Asia; (4) although the share of the urban population residing in megacities is increasing fast, most people continue to live in smaller cities; (5) in many fast-growing cities in developing countries, a significant proportion of people live in slums; and (6) many cities are at a high risk of at least one type of natural hazard.

One of the key knowledge gaps in sustainable urbanization is the lack of a basic understanding of the demography of urbanization, including its spatial dimension. Participants also observed a need to combine spatial and demographic data and highlighted that there is limited understanding of urban populations at risk of climate-related and other hazards. Access to data is too often restricted, with data users frequently unable to access necessary data, including spatial data files. Knowledge gaps were also identified with regard to populations living in slums, urban food security, scalability of good practices and sustainable finance for cities.

In order to address these gaps, data standards and data management practices need to be improved. For example, the use of open data standards and formats, such as GeoJSON, can facilitate data sharing and interoperability. Additionally, efforts should be made to improve data accessibility and transparency, ensuring that data is available to all stakeholders in a timely and understandable manner. This includes developing clear data policies and procedures, as well as providing training and support to data users. Finally, it is important to ensure that data is used responsibly and ethically, protecting the privacy and rights of individuals and communities.

### 3. HIGHLIGHTS OF THE DISCUSSIONS CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

#### A. KEY GAPS

##### *I. Research on the social determinants of outcomes and effecting change*

Many participants raised the need for more research on understanding the social determinants of demographic outcomes and on the determinants of behaviour and normative change. For example, gaps were identified over how family planning programmes can support normative change or how popular cultures and technologies affect youth values and behaviours. Questions about the malleability of social norms more generally also arose. Participants raised a key gap in understanding social determinants and

#### *IV. The need for disaggregated data*

Many participants pointed to the need to disaggregate data by age and sex as well as at the sub-national level. For example, there was limited understanding of the gender dimensions of migration. In particular, data need to be disaggregated to level at which policies are made and programmes implemented. Disaggregated data also enable identification of social, economic and other kinds of inequalities among people, aligning with a focus of the post-2015 development agenda to reduce inequalities within and among countries. Information also needs to be disaggregated in order to understand who is at risk. Data are often insufficiently disaggregated for analytical purposes, or are not sufficiently disaggregated spatially in order to be referenced and of further use for other kinds of population and development research (e.g., the effect of climate change or environmental disasters on urban populations). For example, data disaggregated into urban and rural areas do not necessarily allow for an analysis of the needs of children living in urban areas or populations at risk of climate-related and other hazards, and the composition of populations at risk.

#### *V. The need for more research and data in Africa*

Nearly all sessions highlighted the need for more research and data on Africa, in particular, to understand better the issues of special concern to the region. For example, the unanswered question over why fertility is still high in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa and is not declining faster, and has even stalled, was highlighted as a key knowledge gap. The need to improve the evidence base on labour migration in Africa—where it is often informal and irregular in nature—was identified as another example. Participants also noted priorities for data on youth and labour markets, to understand better both the demand side and supply side of youth employment dynamics, and population subgroups about whom there is relatively limited information (e.g., rural youth and older people). Urbanization in Africa was considered a particularly critical issue, with urbanization rates very high and cities potentially not able to cope with such high rates of growth.

### B. ADDRESSING GAPS AND IMPLEMENTING PRIORITIES

#### *I. Make greater use of existing data sources*

Participants emphasized that data collection and research are costly and should therefore be fully exploited. To achieve a more effective use of data evidence in policymaking, greater engagement of the research community with policymakers is essential. Strong calls were made to greatly expand data accessibility, especially in regard to census and other data at disaggregated levels and to integrate such data with digital maps where possible, although not all participants felt that the focus should be on improved incentives for countries to report data well as improved data linkages. Effective dissemination and use of existing data from population censuses and administrative sources was considered a priority.

Participants called for removing barriers to data sharing and for improving access to microdata

## *II. Promote greater strategic thinking in data collection*

In all sessions, improved data collection was discussed as a means to address key data gaps. While acknowledging that large household-based surveys are crucial to address these gaps, participants called for more “real-time” use of administrative sources and service delivery data. There was widespread support for strengthening capacity for producing data from administrative sources. Examples of administrative sources include CRVS as a source for mortality rates and cause of death and immigration registers that could be useful for measuring international migration. Further, the need for longitudinal data collection and retrospective event history data to understand youth life trajectories was highlighted. Some participants emphasized the need for surveys dedicated to international migration.

Participants stressed the advantages of data that are both comparable over time and across countries to enable researchers to understand how certain phenomena are both changing temporally and under different economic and social contexts. Examples where such information could be particularly insightful include understanding changes in youth well-being over time; understanding how the social, economic and health circumstances of older people are changing over time and in different country contexts, especially in Africa; and providing a more holistic understanding of international migration. Participants also noted that more resources are needed for survey implementation and analysis and to increase the frequency of existing surveys. In some cases, existing survey programmes, such as labour force surveys, could be leveraged to include smaller sub-samples to obtain needed data without mounting a separate effort. Further, there was a call for more data collection to support policy and programme implementation and evaluation, with “real-time” measurement and disaggregation of data at the district level and small enumerations. Lower priority was placed on modelling approaches to address data gaps, although their utility was acknowledged.

## *III. Incorporate innovations in data sources and collection*

Innovative ideas for addressing data challenges were raised in different sessions, especially regarding big data, that is data generated from GPSes, mobile phones, social media, internet use and remote sensing. While big data is another new source of information c

Other innovative suggestions were to establish a human mobility index for the systematic collection of internal migration data, using mobile technology, high resolution satellite imagery, and crowd sourcing to elicit civil society participation and inputs.

#### *IV. Improve data coordination and harmonization*

In order to facilitate data comparability, especially between countries, participants stressed the need for improved coordination as well as for improved international standards to harmonize data collection, terminology and methods. International organizations could enhance their role in supporting coordination among national statistical offices, further developing international standards, and promoting international cooperation and collaboration.





## I. THEMATIC RESEARCH AREAS

### 1. Changing age structures and their impact: youth

- a) Improve understanding of the complexities, challenges and opportunities of the demographic dividend.
- b) Strengthen research on the youth aged 10-14 in order to give this age group greater “visibility” and to address their specific needs.
- c) Improve understanding of effective youth programme implementation and how the intergenerational transmission of poverty can be interrupted.

### 2. Changing age structures and their impact: ageing

- a) Close or reduce knowledge gaps on the economic and social conditions of older persons, in particular their health and disability status and living conditions.
- b) Identify public policies to address the fiscal implications of population ageing (e.g., in the areas of public finance, retirement, pensions, transfers and health care).
- c) Improve understanding of the changing living arrangements and social support networks of the older population.

### 3. Population and global health

- a) Improve the measurement of adult mortality levels and causes of death across the age spectrum.
- b) Improve understanding of the determinants of maternal and child health in low- and lower-middle income countries, including inequities within countries.
- c) Assess the coverage, quality and effectiveness of health interventions.

### 4. Population and reproductive health

- a) Improve the understanding of contraceptive and reproductive decision-making and behaviour over the life course, including their health and development consequences.
- b) Identify policies to reduce childbearing among adolescents.
- c) Identify policy options to address very low fertility.

### 5. Sustainable urbanization

- a) Improve evidence for policies and planning to manage demographic change and rapid urbanisation, especially in sub-Saharan Africa.
- b) Increase access to spatially-disaggregated data to support sustainable city planning.
- c) Identify policy options for managing natural hazards in urban areas, environmental sustainability and resilience.

## 6. International migration and development

- a) Improve the knowledge base on international migration, including levels, trends and impacts as well as forced displacement.
- b) Improve the modelling of migration flows by taking into account economic and demographic differentials, environmental disruption and policies.
- c) Increase and better disseminate evidence on the formative nature of migration for societies and economies.

## II. CROSS-CUTTING RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Improve data collection, including through household surveys and administrative data, and particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, through:
  - a) Identifying the areas in which a global initiative to improve capacity for data collection for population and development at the country level would be most effective, such as providing tools and setting guidelines and standards in collaboration with partners.<sup>7</sup>
  - b) Supporting ownership by individual countries and aligning any activities to their priorities, institutions or procedures even when operating at the global level.
2. Ensure that guidelines, standards and tools for data collection are consistent with guidance provided by the United Nations Statistical Commission and other international and regional organisations and networks.
3. Develop research capacity in the global South, in particular with regard to research needs at the national level, by promoting collaborative research, supporting South-South cooperation and advocating for increased resources.
4. Increase dissemination and use of evidence to ensure that policies and programmes are based on the latest research findings, including by making findings more easily accessible to senior government officials and policymakers at all levels of government.
5. Create subnational datasets for programming and implementation and improving service delivery.
6. Exploit the potential of big data and other innovative data sources, while addressing the challenges of data confidentiality, access and sharing, and harmonising standards, classifications and methods of data collection.
7. Link small area administrative boundary files with publicly available datasets, such as census population data, in order to facilitate data integration and overlays to improve service delivery.

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<sup>7</sup>Such tools include, for example, indirect estimation templates, demographic estimation and projection software or open source packages and National Transfer Accounts workbooks.

### III. COORDINATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

1. Establish inter-agency and expert groups for population-related topics in the post-2015 development agenda to develop indicators, share data, ~~analyze~~ ~~analyze~~ estimates, improve ~~estimation~~ ~~estimation~~ methods, report progress, and enhance national capacities.
2. Draw on the annual sessions of the Commission on Population and Development to strengthen international networks, partnerships and information sharing on priorities for policy-relevant population research and data, and to review existing priorities and identify new ones.
3. Strengthen collaboration with the Statistical Commission to ensure that data collection systems that are vital for population research, including civil

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**9 April 2015**

ENGLISH ONLY

EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON  
THE POST-2015 ERA: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE GLOBAL RESEARCH AGENDA ON  
POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT  
Population Division  
Department of Economic and Social Affairs  
United Nations Secretariat  
New York  
10 April 2015

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

08:45 – 09:00 Registration Conference Room 5

09:00 – 10:00 1. Opening of the meeting Conference Room 5

11:45 – 13:00 Concurrent interactive discussions

4. Changing age structures and their impact: ageing Conference Room E

Key trends: *Population Division, UN DESA*

Moderator: *Jorge Bravo, Population Division, UN DESA*

Expert: *Ronald Lee, University of California, Berkeley*

Expert: *John Haaga, National Institute on Ageing*

Expert: *Reiko Hayashi, National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, Japan*

5. Population and reproductive health Conference Room 5

Key trends: *Population Division, UN DESA*

Moderator: *Bruce Campbell, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)*

Expert: *Amy Tsui, Johns Hopkins University*

Expert: *John Bongaarts, Population Council*

Expert: *Shawn Malarcher, United States Agency for International Development (USAID)*

13:00 – 14:30 Lunch

14:30 – 16:00 Concurrent interactive discussions

6. Sustainable urbanization Conference Room E

Key trends: *Population Division, UN DESA*

Moderator: *Deborah Balk, City University of New York*

Expert: *Shlomo Angel, New York University*

Expert: *Jose Miguel Guzman, ICF International*

Expert: *Lauren Sorkin, Rockefeller Foundation*

7. International migration and development Conference Room 5

Key trends: *Population Division, UN DESA*

Moderator: *Clare Menozzi, Population Division, UN DESA*

Expert: *Pietro Mona, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation*

Expert: *Takiywaa Manuh, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)*

Expert: *Cris Beauchemin, Institut National d'Etudes Démographiques*

16:00 – 16:15 Break

16:15 – 18:00 8. Summary and conclusions Conference Room 5

Summary of key points from each session (in rapporteurs)

Discussion

Concluding remarks: *John Wilmoth, Population Division, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA)*

## Annex 2

### LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

#### INVITED EXPERTS, MODERATORS AND RAPPORTEURS

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