

CHAPTER 3

Policies and persistent and emerging issues: population priorities for the 21st century

The rich information about strategies, policies and programmes related to the ICPD PoA issues provided in the questionnaires consisted of document titles, sometimes accompanied by brief descriptions. The questionnaire was not designed to collect information about their impact, therefore it is difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of policies and programmes.

Policy effectiveness can be assessed indirectly and indicatively by matching the information on trends and their causes and consequences, as presented in Chapter 1, with the policy-related information in Chapter 2. The match can reveal whether crucial causes and consequences of the trends are adequately addressed by relevant policies. When this is the case, some trends can demonstrate positive changes, except those trends (such as ageing) which are irreversible in the short term. However, it is worth noting that policies whose implementation leads to an increase in population coverage may incur an improved registration of cases that otherwise would have remained unknown. This may cause a temporary increase in some negative trends but is a result of policy effectiveness.

The ICPD PoA issues reflect the main causes and consequences of undesirable trends; thus they are at the centre of the analysis presented here.

This chapter consists of two main parts. The first will compare trends and policies by following the three main topics of Chapter 1 complemented by a fourth section on governance. The second provides answers to the three main questions posed in the introduction that serve as a summary of all findings. In conclusion the future of ICPD-relevant policy development is briefly discussed.

A. Population and sustainable development

Interactions between population and sustainable development require that special attention be attributed to population dynamics and its effect on the environment.

Population growth

In 28 countries in the UNECE region the government's policy to population growth is towards its increase, and in 10 countries it is towards maintaining the current level of growth. However, recent research (IIASA, 2013: fn. 1) indicates that current demographic trends are not necessarily a threat, and societies can prosper without growing populations. So macro-level policies aiming at influencing population growth might be redundant. A more appropriate response is to invest in human capital and to improve living conditions for all.

Fertility

Its low level is likely to prevail over the coming decades. Some countries in the eastern part of the region report that they have pronatalist policies. Low fertility signals that families and/or individuals are experiencing obstacles that restrict their choices about the number and timing of their children. Some important obstacles are the focus of family policies discussed in Section C below. It is important to note that by tackling obstacles family policies aim to increase the well-being of families; they are not pronatalist, although they might lead to an increase in childbearing.

Ageing

This process cannot be reversed in the near future; therefore, policies need to adapt to its consequences. Countries report as high priorities issues related to retirement, such as changes in the age of retirement and size of pensions. Priority is given to increasing employment among elderly people. Some ICPD PoA issues, however, require increased attention in the future — specifically, with respect to curbing inequality, ensuring the autonomy of elderly people, and improving health care, care and services for single people (Chapter 2, Section 2). The countries of the region have committed themselves to the 2012 Vienna Ministerial Declaration on Ageing, which requires the development of appropriate policies to ensure successful implementation of the Declaration's goals.

Urbanization and internal migration

For countries situated mainly in the western part of the region, regulatory frameworks are usually part of larger national spatial planning and urban management strategies or programmes. The needs of migrants related to housing, employment and health and social services in urban areas are addressed through public policies with no distinction between resident populations and migrants. Countries situated mainly in the eastern part of the UNECE region with less developed regulatory frameworks may need to include policies explicitly addressing the needs of migrants in urban settings. While policies aim to alleviate the effect of push factors in small-size settlements, less is being done with respect to decentralization of urban agglomerations.

International migration

Migrants have undeniable human rights, and special attention is needed to prevent specific ways in which they are violated. Combating illegal migration and trafficking in human beings; improving the social and economic rights of migrants; enhancing migrants' integration; and promoting international cooperation to manage international migration are the areas that require further attention in the region.

Countries in the region, whether they are countries of migrants' origin or destination, need to strengthen policies that address the root causes of migration, facilitate the flow and productive investment of remittances, and develop the capacity of migrant community groups that further the integration of migrants into their host society. Migrants need additional support in furthering their education and professional qualifications, learning the local language and other enabling skills that would facilitate their integration. While the availability of information useful to migrants is widely reported, specific information might be important to some migrant groups whose traditional stereotypes hinder their integration into the receiving population.

Education

It is commendable that the education systems in UNECE countries are premised on the human right to equal access to education regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, religion, social status, origin or place of birth. Inclusive education is a main aim across countries; however, policies aimed at reaching out

to underserved, vulnerable and disadvantaged children and youth are still required. Early school dropout, especially among boys, remains a problem. Special attention is needed with respect to improving the quality of education, introducing modern technologies and matching the needs of the labour market to appropriate types of education including vocational and lifelong learning.

Civic education as a social investment in forming citizens is an important form of education that needs further strengthening. The same applies to comprehensive sexuality and life skills education. Environmental education is an emerging need that should be addressed through existing or special curricula.

Population and the environment

Although a decline in population growth is not necessarily a threat, population shrinking and even depopulation observed in certain regions within countries raise concerns because productive land is underutilized and infrastructure deteriorates, and the quality of services provided to the remaining population may decline. This emerging issue requires increased attention in the future.

Access to high-quality water sources is currently near universal in the UNECE region. Yet some Central Asian countries still need to accelerate progress in this area, especially in view of population growth. As regards CO² emissions, most western UNECE countries managed to decrease their per capita CO² emissions between 1990 and 2010. Progress is, however, insufficient, and in some countries it has stalled. Further attention to the reduction of CO² emissions and the mitigation of climate change is required across the whole UNECE region.

Policies and programmes regarding populations living in ecologically vulnerable areas and those living within or on the edge of fragile ecosystems are scarce and require further attention.

B. Inequities and social exclusion

Poverty, unemployment and vulnerable groups

Extreme poverty has declined in the poorest countries in the region; still the risk of poverty and social exclusion is high even in the EU countries. The issue is reasonably well addressed with policies, but they can hardly be expected to have been effective during the recent financial crisis. Therefore,

countries see this issue as persistent and a high priority during the next 5–10 years.

Creating decent jobs for unemployed people and improving education are seen as key ways to reduce poverty. Yet unemployment increased during times of crisis. Country comparisons showed that the unemployment rate is lower where relevant policies are at a more advanced stage of implementation. Therefore, policies do matter, and their timely implementation can help curb this negative trend.

The analysis revealed that some population groups such as youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, and ethnic and other minority groups continue to be at a structural disadvantage and stand to suffer more from unemployment and poverty than others in a number of countries. These groups need greater attention with respect to access to and inclusion in education, including lifelong learning. Continuing education is especially appropriate among young people, among whom unemployment is very high. Another future policy priority is their social inclusion and participation and full coverage with social services. Further improvement is needed in the care for elderly people and persons with disabilities, and attention is increasingly being paid to non-institutional care.

Gender issues

Statistical data on gender issues reveal significant achievements in bridging gender gaps in most countries of the UNECE region. The proportion of girls who complete secondary education is today higher than that of boys, and the proportion of women with tertiary-level education is larger than that of men. School dropout rates among boys are high, and higher than those for girls. Representation of women in politics and governance is on the rise, and the gender wage gap is declining.

However, gender gaps remain, and the issues raised by the ICPD PoA persist. The education needs of boys require special attention. Gaps in education have also been reported in terms of harmful practices and adverse social traditions among poor people and minority groups. The hourly gender pay gap also remains, although the trend is slightly positive. The resulting gender gap in old-age pensions requires increased attention. Countries report progress in women's participation in the formal and informal economy, but it remains a major priority for the future.

Child marriages and forced marriages, resulting in births at an early age, and FGM/C are on the decline and only exist among some minorities. Combating these harmful traditional practices can continue even after 'zero new cases' reporting is reached, until the practices are ultimately rejected by today's proponents. The data on domestic violence show an increase during the last decade in some countries, although the availability of policies and programmes is reported. This tendency should be considered carefully because when policies and information campaigns among vulnerable populations are effective, they may lead to a higher level of reporting violence than before. Thus effective policies may result in a temporary negative trend. Therefore, more research is necessary before concluding that gender-based violence is on the rise.

Gender mainstreaming has been achieved in a number of public policies. However, it is difficult to monitor the gender component in each and every policy. Gender-sensitive monitoring instruments are, therefore, recommended to identify the remaining gender inequality gaps.

An emerging issue is the need to support fathers' rights, especially after a couple's separation.

Social exclusion

Policies are also required to enable participation and social inclusion of those structurally at a disadvantage through cross-sectoral strategies that include protection against gender-based violence and child abuse; creating employment opportunities for youth, older persons and persons with disabilities; supporting young people in making informed decisions about their lives; raising awareness about their social rights and facilitating their access to social services; and preventing discrimination, stigmatization and other forms of social exclusion.

Minority groups, including the Roma populations, can be subject to double deprivation due to stigmatization and harmful practices and, therefore, require further policy attention in the countries concerned.

C. Families and sexual and reproductive health

Families and households

It is reassuring to note a wide range of family and welfare policies around the region and that they have been frequently updated during the recent few years.

Increasing numbers of new forms of living arrangements for families and households require relevant policies to be expanded and modified. Families and households experiencing new living arrangements such as cohabitating couples, including those with children, and same-sex couples require further policy attention that factors in upholding and protecting the human rights of all concerned.

The pervasiveness of the dilemma between paid work in the labour force and unpaid family work indicates that policies extensively address the reconciliation between work and family life, related mainly to parental leave, economic support and childcare. The supply of the latter, however, does not meet the demand.

Poor families with children need more attention to avoid the vicious cycle of reproduction of poverty. Single-parent families require continued support; they are vulnerable to poverty especially when the single parent is the mother.

Families in vulnerable groups need specific attention. These include provision of assistance to families with family members with disabilities, family members with HIV, and single-person households. Young generations that experience hardships, incurred by lasting economic crisis and long-term joblessness, remain 'scarred' in their subsequent life. This issue has not attracted sufficient attention. More rigorous research and policy monitoring instruments and subsequent knowledge-based policy action may be needed.

More attention is necessary on how to alleviate the effect of uncertainty that families may experience about childbirth. Combating the effect of adverse traditions that might provoke child or forced marriage with policies and information campaigns is also a future priority.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights

It is promising that a range of negative SRH trends, such as teenage pregnancy and maternal mortality,

are declining significantly. Yet there is space for further improvement, especially among population groups linked with traditions of child and teenage marriages. Abortion rates have declined considerably across the region, due to a sustained availability and use of contraception particularly in the eastern part of the region. Induced abortion is generally accessible across the region. In a few countries it is legal only for rigorously defined medical reasons or specific cases such as rape.

The increased prevalence of HIV and STIs in the eastern part of the region calls for an adequate strengthening of relevant policy and action. Indeed, many significant achievements have been reported from the countries in the region, including its western part. Provisions for SRHR have been incorporated in general legal and other regulatory documents. Most of the relevant laws were established more than five years ago. There have also been frequent amendments over the last five years. Policies and programmes have been recently implemented to enlarge the scope of the services provided and to increase their quality, as well as to broaden the coverage of population groups to ensure wider inclusion of vulnerable and underserved groups.

The provision of information and counselling on SRHR is widely reported. It is delivered in many ways, such as through the distribution of booklets and other materials, and advocacy and counselling provided by specialized institutions. NGOs have also been involved in this activity.

Education, mainly in secondary schools, has included topics of SRH and SRR, but specially designed curricula on these topics remain rare. WHO has developed sexuality education guidelines and minimum standards that might be adapted to the local context and used more widely. Specific teaching techniques and training are offered to families waiting for the birth of a child, for self-examination of breast cancer and others.

Access to SRH services is provided by most of the countries for the whole population on an equal basis under the main objective of ensuring health for all, independently of gender, age, religion, ethnicity and origin. Persons without social or health insurance should be able to receive the health and reproductive health services they need (including for the mother and child in cases of pregnancy). Contraceptives are available for free among vulnerable groups such as poor people.

However, in addition to maintaining and upholding SRHR, further policy attention is required regarding access to SRH for persons with disabilities, poor people, migrants, marginalized groups and older persons. SRH services may need further integration with HIV and other health services and with the primary health-care systems across all countries. Further efforts are required to reduce financial barriers to access to quality SRH services, particularly in some new EU Member States and countries in Central Asia.

Another important topic is the relevance of SRHR to specific groups such as sex workers, men who have sex with men, and drug users. Information on the health and social implications of behavioural and health risks should be made available to similar at-risk groups.

While SRH services are available, it is difficult to ascertain their quality. Better monitoring of the quality of services is, therefore, vital.

The positive development of policies and action related to SRR and SRH seems to contradict the observed spread of HIV in the eastern part of the UNECE region. Part of the increased incidence in HIV and also in cervical cancer might be due to the increased population coverage and spread of information. Medical advances might additionally contribute to an earlier diagnosis of the virus, thus temporarily increasing the number of new cases. Therefore, policy effectiveness might have contributed to a temporary increase in these trends.³⁰

Countries need to enforce data collection efforts to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of policies. Also, rigorous research and monitoring is necessary to establish the deep causes and identify the necessary interventions and regulatory frameworks to reverse negative trends.

³⁰ Data for Belarus provide persuasive evidence. The number of new HIV cases doubled from 2000 to 2012 (remaining low when compared to other countries). The peak in 2000 was in the age group 20–24 years, while in 2012 it moved up to those aged 30–34. It is hard to expect that the mean age of the most vulnerable groups has increased; rather, new cases registered in 2012 might include individuals who became HIV-positive some years earlier (Source: data supplied by the Department of HIV/AIDS Prevention of the Republican and Regional Centre of Hygiene, Epidemiology and Public Health).

D. Governance

Non-governmental organizations

The survey shows that the involvement of and government partnership with CSOs, in particular NGOs, is a most effective way to implement the ICPD PoA. The high level of approval of this partnership is solid proof of the important and effective role of NGOs in meeting its objectives. This is one of the significant achievements in governance during the last 20 years. Indeed, the number of NGOs in the eastern part of the UNECE region has increased considerably since 1994. NGOs today offer support in many ways, such as by raising awareness and through social mobilization as well as advocacy and policy formulation. NGOs provide information and help citizens defend their rights; they also alert governments about violations of human rights.

As the scope of human rights expands with normative and societal change, institutions of civil society can play a crucial role in highlighting and advocating for these changes. NGOs were reported to be less active, however, in the area of monitoring and evaluation of policy implementation: an important matter because it enables citizens to oversee the functioning of the government and other public institutions.

Private-sector organizations

Governments find it mutually beneficial to partner with private-sector organizations mainly in service delivery, awareness creation and social mobilization. The issues highlighted in the ICPD PoA related to education and training are an area of particularly close partnership between governments and private-sector organizations.

In the health system, private service providers (including clinics) also offer services related to SRH including ART and abortion. Their development is market-oriented. Expanding the availability of private facilities delivering reproductive health and childcare services may be considered, particularly where public supply is below demand and insufficient in quality.

Involving citizens in the public domain

Social investment increases quality of life in diverse ways, either through improved health or increased human capital. It also leads to heightened awareness about population and development issues. The strengthening of values such as solidarity, tolerance

and others that support acceptance of dynamically changing societies in the interest of all citizens is relevant for the UNECE countries beyond 2014.

In the context of the ICPD PoA, social solidarity and participation is of particular relevance to disadvantaged groups such as young people, elderly people, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities and migrants.

Citizens' awareness has increased, also through NGO activities. However, raising awareness among the potentially disadvantaged groups and, specifically, ethnic groups and minorities, requires meticulous attention because they are frequently socially excluded and can remain alienated from societal development.

Data and research

Research and regularly produced good-quality statistical data are vital for planning, monitoring and evaluation. Information is particularly crucial to reach out to vulnerable groups whose specific situations are not covered by regular data collection.

Additional data can be gathered with large-scale cross-sectional and panel surveys. There are various international surveys, in particular in the EU, but survey information is scarce in the eastern part of the UNECE region. Demographic and Health Surveys carried out in most countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia through the early 2000s, but more recently available only for Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Albania, still constitute a main source of related information in these countries.

Research on issues related to the ICPD PoA is taking place mainly at the national level. Analysis at the subnational level is equally important and should not be neglected, as people in remote or underdeveloped areas may be particularly vulnerable.

Research and data collection are necessary for both targeted policy planning and evaluation of the impact of policies and programmes. This requires relevant research institutions, sustained capacity development and adequate funding. Research institutes on population and development exist in a number of UNECE countries; the quality of research in some countries, however, requires further improvement. This can be achieved if institutions in the eastern and western parts of the region exchange knowledge and good practices.

Concluding remarks

The answers to the three questions posed in the introduction are briefly as follows.

To what extent has the ICPD's new paradigm for population policies been applied in the region? Is the individual at the centre of population policies? Are human rights and dignity at the centre of policies?

Most advanced western countries of the UNECE region do not have explicit population policies. Population issues, however, have been part and parcel of broader social and economic policies. For example, policies to reduce poverty encompass different groups such as youth, older persons and other groups. Youth poverty, in turn, is also addressed in a cross-sectoral way through a range of policies dealing with poverty, education, employment or family.

The cross-sectoral approach to a specific population issue across numerous 'population-related' policies ensures that human rights and the dignity of individuals are at the centre of policies. Yet it raises two challenges. First, since the issue is not a priority in a specific policy area, it might be addressed with less attention than necessary.³¹ Second, monitoring a specific population issue in such circumstances requires the consideration of a variety of policies, which makes analysis more complex. One way to address this challenge is to construct cross-sectoral indicators such as the indicators on human development or active ageing.

Countries in the eastern part of the region have had a different experience with population policies, particularly with pronatalist policies. Policies aimed at specific macro-level demographic indicators are common. However, the implementation of such policies is often difficult, as the issues are cross-sectoral, and care should be taken that such policies do not compromise the rights of individuals and couples.

Has there been progress in implementing all aspects of the PoA? Are all issues on population and development raised in the ICPD PoA being harmoniously addressed with policy action, or are some lagging behind others?

³¹ This has been noticed with gender mainstreaming, where addressing gender issues in a number of different laws may make them less visible.

Individual human rights and dignity are at the centre of the issues highlighted by the ICPD PoA. They are all adequately reflected in relevant policies in the UNECE countries. Further achievements, recognized by countries, are expected with respect to vulnerable groups, and specifically young people, elderly people, migrants, minorities and ethnic groups.

The ICPD PoA is not only relevant for developing countries. Contemporary demographic trends in advanced countries (such as population decline or ageing) determine development processes and outcomes. This interaction is important for the achievement of social sustainability — i.e. maintaining low levels of poverty, reducing inequality, fighting deprivation and social exclusion, and preserving intergenerational equity. Population and development issues are as relevant to this region as they are to any other.

In this context, it is suggested that the issues raised in the ICPD need to be updated to reflect the evolving demographic dynamics across countries including those that are economically advanced. This is all the more relevant as such dynamics are likely to concern an increasing number of populations as both fertility and mortality decline globally, leading to a deceleration in population growth and increasing ageing.

Which are the issues that persist, even though they have been addressed with relevant policies? What issues have emerged over the last two decades that need to be considered in an update of the PoA?

During the two decades since the ICPD, societies and standards of living have undergone significant changes that redefine our understanding of human rights and individual needs. Vulnerable population groups will continue to exist, as will some inequality and social exclusion and diseases. They may change, but the challenges of ensuring well-being and a dignified life for all, particularly those who are at a structural disadvantage, will persist and will, therefore, always require relevant policy commitment and adjustment. Thus the dynamic nature of societies means that certain of the issues highlighted in the PoA will persist, even if their characteristics may change.

Similarly, the demand for the full protection of human rights will grow and spread. Recognition of fundamental human rights will expand with social

change. Change in upholding and exercising human rights will always be reflected in an adjustment in the corresponding issues: this is indeed part of progress. Progress, however, is uneven, and during particular periods such as the recent economic and financial crisis certain human rights need particular attention.

New issues emerge along with societal change. New family forms such as cohabitation, the spread of HIV in the eastern part of the region, and new forms of gender inequality are some examples among others discussed in this report that require a broader understanding of the issues addressed in the PoA and relevant policy action.

In a final observation, the questions raised received positive answers throughout this report; yet they have also shed light on new issues that require increased policy attention in the future.

Enabling choices has been considered throughout the report. Policies related to offering new and informed choices aim to provide a higher quality of life and as such complement those policies that are directly related to human rights. Beyond protecting human rights, policies can help people by alleviating barriers that make it harder for them to realize their personal choices in life.

Raising human capital and improving education were also emphasized frequently throughout this report. Investment in education can have high economic returns. It also reinforces citizenship along with heightened awareness and willingness to participate in societal life. NGOs and community organizations emerge out of this awareness and drive societal efforts to reach sustained equitable and rights-based development.

This regional report offers valuable input into the design of the post-2015 agenda. It provides important information on individual human rights and dignity related to population and development, which the Millennium Development Goals did not particularly address.

Three of the five main topics in the report of the High Level Panel for the post-2015 agenda are inherent in this regional report. One is 'Leave no one behind', reflected in the strong emphasis on vulnerable and structurally disadvantaged groups. Another is 'Put sustainable development at the core', with the

emphasis on interactions between population and sustainable development.

The third topic is 'Forge a new global partnership'. The report outlined a significant subregional divide, crudely into western and eastern parts of the UNECE region. It is recommended to aim to reduce regional disparities, which can be achieved with broad international partnership based on the principles of solidarity and cooperation.