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Geneva, 1 and 2 October 2018

Report of the UNECE Regional Conference on ICPD+25 “Enabling Choices: Population Dynamics and Sustainable Development”

I. Introduction

1. In 2014, the international community reviewed progress on the 20 years of implementation of the Programme of Action of ICPD at national, regional and global levels. The regional reviews were led by the United Nations Regional Commissions in close collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Their outcomes contributed to the global review of the ICPD Beyond 2014, which took place at the 47th session of the Commission on Population and Development (CPD) and culminated in the 29th Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly on 22 September 2014. Concluding the review, CPD in its Resolution 2014/1 requested the Secretary-General, in collaboration with the United Nations system and relevant organizations, to continue assessing and reporting on progress towards the full implementation of the Programme of Action of ICPD.

2. In response to the CPD resolution 2014/1, ECE and the UNFPA Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regional Office (EECARO) jointly organized the high-level Regional Conference on ICPD+25 under the title “Enabling Choices: Population Dynamics and Sustainable Development”. The Conference took place at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland from 1 to 2 October 2018.

3. National official delegations from 40 UNECE member States participated in the Conference. The following member States were present: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and Uzbekistan.

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4. The Conference was also attended by representatives of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, European Commission, European Union, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), World Bank, and World Health Organization (WHO). Representatives of various civil society organizations, including youth representatives and experts from academic institutions also participated in the conference. In total, 275 participants attended the Conference. The full list of participants and the Conference programme are available at the conference website.¹

A. Opening plenary session

5. Ms. Lidia Bratanova, Director of Statistical Division, ECE and Mr. Dereje Wordofa, Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director, UNFPA opened the Conference and welcomed the participants.

6. The Conference elected three co-chairs to lead the conference deliberations: H.E. Ms. Irina Kostevich, Minister of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Belarus; H.E. Ambassador Deyana Kostadinova, Permanent Representative of Bulgaria to the United Nations in Geneva; and H.E. Ambassador Rosemary McCarney, Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations at Geneva. The co-chairs were elected for both days of the Conference. Mr. Guillem Fortuny, Independent Expert from Spain, was designated as the Rapporteur of the Conference. The Conference participants adopted the agenda (ECE/AC.32/2018/1).

B. ICPD 25 years later: Recommitting to the vision of Cairo

7. Speaking to the theme of ICPD 25 years later, Ms. Sarah Kennell from Canada who had been a Youth delegate at the ICPD Beyond 2014 Regional Conference shared her perspective on progress for youth. Mr. Eduard Kluisha from the Belarusian Association of Assistance to Children and Young People with Disabilities then shared his perspective of a person living with disabilities.

8. These interventions were followed by a presentation by Mr. Wolfgang Lutz, Founder and Director of the Wittgenstein Centre for Demography and Global Human Capital, who highlighted the synergies between the ICPD PoA and the 2030 Agenda. In his presentation he stressed that while demography is not explicitly addressed in the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, a multi-dimensional population framework focusing on education and health can be effective in addressing population dynamics to achieve the sustainable development goals.

9. Ms. Vitalija Gaucaite Wittich, Chief of the Population Unit, ECE and Ms. Alanna Armitage, Regional Director for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, UNFPA presented the Report on the ICPD Programme of Action implementation in the UNECE Region “Fulfilling the Potential of Present and Future Generations”. They shared the findings from the report by highlighting the persistent and emerging issues with regard to population and development in the UNECE region (Extracts from the UNECE Regional Report on ICPD+25 –

¹ <http://www.unece.org/pau/icpd25.html>

ECE/AC.32/2018/3). While explaining the method and data used for preparing the report, they also briefly introduced the UNECE Monitoring Framework for the ICPD Programme of Action beyond 2014 developed with a support of a multi-stakeholder expert group.

10. The launch of the Regional Report was followed by the member States' statements.² National delegates expressed appreciation for the Regional Report and Monitoring Framework noting their importance to furthering the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action (PoA) and the sustainable development goals (SDGs). They reaffirmed commitment to implementing the ICPD PoA and the recommendations of the 2013 Chair's Summary and stressed the centrality of the ICPD PoA in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. They called for the ICPD+25 review to inform the upcoming progress review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and emphasized the need to synchronize the ICPD and SDG reviews. Member States also requested to publish and transmit the UNECE Regional Report on ICPD+25 and the rapporteurs' summary of the Conference deliberations to the 52nd UN Commission on Population and Development. In their statements, member States highlighted national progress in implementing the ICPD PoA, but also gaps in national implementation and elaborated on plans to address them and to follow-up on the recommendations of the 2013 Chair's summary.

11. The civil society organizations (CSO) and youth delegates from the ECE region held their respective consultations on the days preceding the Conference. Their designated representatives delivered statements on behalf of CSOs and Youth addressing regional progress and persisting issues and gaps in implementing the ICPD PoA in the ECE region. CSO representatives called for addressing inequalities, increasing financial resources as well as creating an enabling environment where CSOs and academia can participate meaningfully to implement ICPD PoA and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

C. Thematic sessions

12. In addition to the opening and closing plenary sessions, the Conference discussions were organized in three thematic sessions. The first thematic session focused on Population Dynamics and Sustainable Development; the second session on Families, Sexual and Reproductive Health over the Life Course, and the third session on Inequalities, Social Inclusion and Rights. Each thematic session started with a panel discussion³ and was followed by statements and comments from national delegations, experts and civil society organizations.

13. The first thematic session on 'Population Dynamics and Sustainable Development' discussed the complex inter-relationships between low fertility, ageing, migration and sustainable development in the ECE region and reaffirmed the 2013 Chair's summary recommendations. Speakers noted that the prevailing below-replacement fertility rates in the large majority of ECE member States as well as gains in longevity are the main drivers for population ageing in the region. In some countries in the region this trend is further accelerated by the out-migration of working-age population, contributing to brain-drain, and challenges to the sustainability of pension, social security and health care systems. Investing in quality education, smooth education-to-employment transitions, enabling environments for young persons and necessary infrastructure and services were identified as key strategies to reverse such trends. The need to take a long-term, holistic, rights-based approach to population dynamics and its linkages with sustainable development and the need to invest in

² A list of subscribed interventions during the plenary and thematic discussions is included in Annex II. The texts of delivered statements are available on the conference website (<http://www.unece.org/pau/icpd25.html>)

³ For the list of speakers see Conference programme (<http://www.unece.org/pau/icpd25.html>)

human capital across generations within the framework of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development were emphasized.

14. Low fertility has traditionally been linked with higher development, but more recent data suggests that fertility rises with very high level of development (as measured by Human Development Index) in countries that have achieved higher level of gender equality in all aspects of life. Panellists emphasized that work-family reconciliation remains an important challenge in the ECE region. The need for changing gender norms and stereotypes and more equally distributing unpaid care and domestic work between men and women was highlighted. These are still largely borne by women, hindering their labour force participation, contributing to the gender pay gap and increasing women's risk of old-age poverty. Governmental support for families has increased over the past years. It was noted, however, that this support was not always addressed at men and women equally and was not always adapted to changing family formation patterns. As a result, such support did not always increase choices in combining work and family life nor did it in a more gender-balanced way.

15. Speakers highlighted the need to combat age-based stereotypes and discrimination, recognize and support the productivity of older generations and promote healthy, active and independent living in old age. Challenges discussed include social isolation of older persons in both rural and urban areas as well as access to health care services. The need for continuous monitoring of population dynamics was underlined, stressing the importance of high-quality quantitative and qualitative data and disaggregation by age, gender, vulnerability status and geography. Monitoring the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action also contributes to the monitoring of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and related processes such as the upcoming 25-year review of the Beijing Platform of Action.

16. The second thematic session focused on 'Families, Sexual and Reproductive Health over the Life Course'. The panel acknowledged significant reductions in unmet need for family planning, adolescent pregnancy and infant mortality in the ECE region but stressed that aggregate gains mask prevailing inequalities within and across countries as well as discrimination against vulnerable groups. The central importance of providing an integrated package of sexual and reproductive health information and quality services across the life course was emphasized and the WHO Europe Action Plan for Sexual and Reproductive Health was mentioned in this regard. Member States emphasized the centrality of sexual and reproductive health and rights in 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and ICPD PoA and a key reference point in the 2013 Chair summary. They reported on efforts towards removing access barriers to sexual and reproductive health care. Progress was noted in expanding antenatal care and reducing maternal mortality, but the latter is still a concern in some countries in the eastern part of the ECE region. Surveillance systems for maternal mortality and elimination of gaps in the quality of maternal health care services, including emergency obstetric care are needed to achieve further reductions of maternal deaths, including in humanitarian settings.

17. Member States noted that progress in ensuring access to modern contraception and the quality of family planning services remains a challenge, particularly for youth and vulnerable populations, placing them at risk of sexually transmitted infections including HIV and unplanned pregnancies. Speakers highlighted the importance for comprehensive sexuality education and commitments to increasing the allocation of funds from state budgets for contraceptive procurement and ensuring access to a full range of affordable contraceptive methods and counselling. A number of interventions also underlined the importance of universal health coverage and access to safe abortion and expressed concern about mounting pressure against women and girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights.

18. During the second thematic session, participants also noted the continuing high incidence of HIV in the region and the predominant role played by sexual transmission in the

spread of HIV. They also highlighted the importance of considering the needs of key populations affected by HIV, including issues related to stigma and discrimination that create barriers to accessing sexual and reproductive health services. The need for the generation of data was raised, as data collected on sexual and reproductive health needs often focuses on women of reproductive age, excluding older persons and key populations such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people whose needs are insufficiently understood and neglected as a result. The need to enhance multi-stakeholder approaches, the engagement of civil society organisations and accountability mechanisms were also recognized.

19. The third thematic session on ‘Inequalities, Social Inclusion and Rights’ addressed the situation of vulnerable population groups, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Panellists voiced concern about persisting gender inequalities in labour force participation, earnings, access to leadership positions in public and private life and in reconciling work and family life. They highlighted the need for stronger commitment and political will for achieving gender equality in the region. One of the prevailing challenges is gender-based violence and speakers highlighted the importance of ratifying and implementing relevant international conventions and instruments. A number of member States shared progress made in developing relevant action plans and implementing policy measures to raise awareness about and eliminate gender-based violence as well as harmful practices such as early and child marriage, and gender-biased sex selection.

20. Inequalities and social exclusion were discussed through the angles of poverty, inter-generational equity and the inclusion of marginalized groups. Poverty was discussed as central to individual and household vulnerability, resulting in and perpetuating exclusion and inequality cycles. Age-based discrimination is of concern to youth and older generations and the need for enhanced efforts to ensure social inclusion, opportunities and participation for young and older persons were highlighted during the session. Minority groups such as persons living with disabilities, people living with HIV, migrants, ethnic minorities, and LGBTI persons continue to face exclusion, material deprivation and inferior educational and health outcomes. They are often subject to multiple vulnerabilities, stigma and negative stereotypes that need to be addressed to ensure social inclusion, equal opportunities and the protection of human rights.

21. During the thematic sessions, member States also requested the transmission of the UNECE Regional Report on ICPD+25 and the Rapporteur’s summary of the Conference deliberations to the 52nd UN Commission on Population and Development and regional follow up and review of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development.

22. Several International Organizations participated in the conference, highlighting gaps and progress in implementation of the ICPD PoA and committing to integrate relevant issues raised in the ICPD+25 regional review into national and regional consultations related to their own work and mandates, including Beijing+25 taking place next year.

D. Closing plenary session of the conference

23. The Closing Plenary session was chaired by H.E. Irina Kostevich, Minister of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Belarus. H.E. Ambassador Deyana Kostadinova presented highlights from the deliberations during the two days of the Conference (see Annex). She was followed by Mr. Ramiz Alakbarov, Director of Programme and Strategy Division of UNFPA, who informed conference delegates about the linkages between the ICPD+25 global and regional reviews which will inform the 52th session of the CPD under the theme of “Review and appraisal of the Programme of Action of the ICPD and its contribution to follow up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. In

his remarks he underlined the strong link between the ICPD and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

24. Ms. Vitalija Gaucaite Wittich, Chief, Population Unit of UNECE, presented an outline of the draft report of the Conference noting that the conference outcomes – the Report on the ICPD Programme of Action implementation in the UNECE Region “Fulfilling the Potential of Present and Future Generations” together with the rapporteur’s summary of the conference deliberations - will inform the 52nd Session of the Commission on Population and Development in April 2019.

25. In the closing remarks, Ms. Olga Algayerova, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary, UNECE and Ms. Alanna Armitage, Director of the Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, UNFPA underlined the the continued relevance and value of the ICPD PoA and 2013 Chair’s summary and the renewed commitment to its implementation. Echoing participants call for making inequality and social exclusion a part of history, they underlined the linkages between the ICPD and 2030 Agenda stating that population dynamics – and people – are at the heart of the Sustainable Development Goals.

26. H.E. Irina Kostevich thanked her co-chairs and organisers from UNFPA and UNECE for a successful event as well as interpreters and all the support staff for their work. She thanked all conference participants for their participation and contributions and closed the conference.

Annex I

Highlights from the conference discussions

presented by the co-Chair of the Conference
H.E Ambassador Deyana Kostadinova (Bulgaria)

Excellencies,
Dear delegates,

As the ICPD+25 conference for the UNECE region is coming to an end, I'm pleased to present some highlights of our rich and fascinating deliberations over the past two days.

I want to stress that this is not a comprehensive account; a comprehensive report of the conference deliberations will be made available later.

This is also not an official chair's summary; the 2013 Chair's Summary remains the reference document for the implementation of the ICPD Beyond 2014 agenda.

In the opening session, member States reaffirmed their commitments to implementing the ICPD Programme of Action and the 2013 Chair's Summary.

They expressed support for the Regional Report and the Monitoring Framework to further the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action and the SDGs.

Member States also reaffirmed the centrality of the ICPD Programme of Action in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

They called for the ICPD+25 review to inform the upcoming progress review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and emphasized the need to synchronize the ICPD and SDG reviews.

Member States highlighted national progress in implementing the ICPD Programme of Action, evidenced by the wealth of strategic, policy and programmatic frameworks in place to advance the recommendations of the 2013 Chair's Summary. They also stressed gaps in national implementation and plans to address these gaps.

Throughout the conference deliberations, concerns were raised over the emergence of regressive laws and policies threatening to undermine gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights, and over the shrinking space for civil society.

Member States expressed appreciation for UNECE and UNFPA in their support of implementation and review of the ICPD Programme of Action.

During the first thematic session population dynamics and sustainable development, we looked at the demographic context in the region, and highlighted major trends such as below-replacement fertility in a majority of countries, gains in longevity, and population ageing.

We learned that the traditional view – that more development means lower fertility – is not valid any longer in all contexts: in high development countries, moving up on the human development index also means higher fertility levels – except in countries where gender norms don't shift or shift too slowly.

The traditional association between marriage and high fertility is also weakening, as in some countries a majority of childbirths already happen outside of marriage.

Several member States highlighted the complex inter-relationships between low fertility, ageing and migration. It was noted that out-migration flows of the working-age population accelerate population ageing, weaken economies, contribute to brain-drain and challenge the

sustainability of pension, social security and health care systems. Supporting smooth education-to-employment transitions, creating enabling environments for young persons to remain in or return to the country, and upgrading the quality of infrastructure and services, were identified as key strategies to reverse such trends.

More broadly, participants stressed the need for long-term, holistic, and rights-based approaches to population dynamics and their linkages with sustainable development, and the need to invest in human capital across generations. With regard to the young more specifically, the need to invest in quality education, including comprehensive sexuality education, decent work opportunities, and young persons' participation in all decisions that affect their lives was emphasized.

It was noted that governments are increasing investments in family support, but that family policies are not always gender-sensitive and haven't always been adapted to changing family formation patterns.

Participants stated that more must be done to allow women and men to reconcile work and family life which remains a challenge in the region, oftentimes impacting the education, careers and childbearing choices of working-age generations.

In this context, the importance of redistributing unpaid care and domestic work between women and men was highlighted, given that unpaid work at home is largely borne by women, driving them out of the labour market, perpetuating gender gaps and increasing the risk of old-age poverty.

A number of participants emphasized the need to promote healthy, active and independent living of older generations, including by strengthening measures to support the productivity of older persons and combating age-based stereotypes and social isolation. More effective active ageing strategies also require better disaggregation of data, including for the oldest-old age group.

The second thematic session, on families and sexual and reproductive health over the life course, started with an overview of major trends, including significant reductions in unmet need for family planning and adolescent pregnancy and a still high reliance on traditional methods of contraception in parts of the region.

It was pointed out that aggregate gains in the region mask significant inequalities, with many being left out and patterns of exclusion being different from country to country.

Several participants emphasized the need for upholding true commitment to sexual and reproductive health and rights, and the need to end stigma and discrimination affecting many of the most vulnerable people.

It was noted that we are witnessing an increased politicization of women and girls' right to make their own informed decisions about sex and childbearing.

Several participants highlighted the central importance of an integrated package of sexual and reproductive health information and services, integrated at primary health care level.

It was stated that expanding reproductive health and rights and gender equality does not negatively affect fertility; in fact, examples from the region show that it often goes hand-in-hand with higher fertility and economic growth.

Member States reported about progress in guaranteeing universal access to sexual and reproductive health care. This included the removal of access barriers, such lowering the age at which adolescents can access services without need for parental consent, the allocation of budgets for the procurement of contraceptives for the most vulnerable, and increased focus on the sexual and reproductive health of older persons.

Progress was noted in the reduction of maternal mortality and the expansion of antenatal care, but maternal mortality still remains high in some countries in the eastern part of the region. Surveillance systems for and investigations of maternal mortality are vital for further reductions. Some speakers stressed that safe abortion saves lives.

Many participants called for the provision of comprehensive sexuality education to all young people, and some member states committed to make progress in this regard.

The increased role played by sexual transmission in the region's HIV epidemic was noted, and it was stressed that stigma and discrimination of key populations particularly affected must be ended.

Several member States addressed the importance of access to safe abortion.

Some member States also highlighted the prevalence of harmful practices such as child marriage and gender-biased sex selection in some countries in the region, which are deeply rooted in gender inequalities and social attitudes.

In the third thematic session on inequalities, social inclusion and rights, the persistence of gender inequalities in the fields of economic, social and political participation was highlighted.

Key features mentioned include inequalities in workforce participation, earnings, access to leadership positions in public and private life, work-family balance, and gender-based violence.

Some of the challenges mentioned include the trend towards use of gender-neutral language in laws and policies, threatening to obscure the effects of gender inequalities; growing religious fundamentalism; and women's heightened vulnerability in face of crises.

Member States noted measures undertaken to make progress towards equal rights and opportunities for women and men. These include the development of legislation or action plans for the implementation of the Istanbul Convention and other international frameworks, and the establishment or strengthening of institutional mechanisms for multi-sectoral responses to gender-based violence.

Measures also include addressing harmful stereotypes, and the elimination of early and child marriage through setting 18 as the minimum age of marriage in all forms of marital community and sensitizing communities.

Eliminating son-preference and gender-biased sex selection is a related priority, and is being addressed through local campaigns targeting parents, adolescents and religious leaders.

It was mentioned that poverty is at the centre of individual and household vulnerability, resulting in and perpetuating exclusion and inequality cycles. It was stressed that fighting poverty must be at the heart of all policies.

In many countries, minority groups, including ethnic minorities, such as the Roma, and persons with disabilities, LGBTI people, migrants, older people and other groups continue to face persistent exclusion, material deprivation and inferior educational and health outcomes.

It was stressed that to end HIV more must be done to address underlying factors of vulnerability, especially stigma and discrimination of key populations, ensuring that those furthest behind are reached first, and the important role of community-based organization in ending HIV was emphasized.

Other initiatives to address inequalities include the creation of youth-friendly communities, involvement of young people in decision-making, inclusive education without discrimination, the integration of persons with disabilities in all sectors of public life, and the integration of migrants.

Vital measures to achieve inclusive education include ensuring a comprehensive legal provision against discrimination in education, adopting a school desegregation strategy, raising awareness and ensuring quality of education in all schools in line with the European Convention on human rights.

It was recommended that the outcome of the ICPD+25 review be fed into national and regional consultations related to Beijing+25, the 2019 Commission on Population and Development, and the voluntary national reviews of the 2030 Agenda.

Annex II

List of subscribed statements

Plenary

- 1 Bulgaria
- 2 Belarus
- 3 France
- 4 Netherlands
- 5 Armenia
- 6 The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
- 7 Uzbekistan
- 8 Germany
- 9 Republic of Moldova
- 10 Norway
- 11 Sweden
- 12 Switzerland

First Thematic Session: Population Dynamics and Sustainable Development

- 1 Bosnia and Herzegovina
- 2 World Bank
- 3 UN Women
- 4 Beauty of Help Foundation - Czech Republic
- 5 Demographic Research Center - Republic of Moldova
- 6 World Health Organization
- 7 Centre for Reproductive Rights
- 8 Y-Peer

Second Thematic Session: Families, Sexual and Reproductive Health over the Life Course

- 1 Latvia
- 2 Azerbaijan
- 3 Georgia
- 4 Armenia
- 5 Netherlands
- 6 Kazakhstan
- 7 Bulgaria
- 8 UNAID
- 9 Marie Stopes International
- 10 Union Women Center
- 11 WHO
- 12 The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Third Thematic Session: Inequalities, Social Inclusion and Rights

- 1 Georgia
- 2 Bulgaria
- 3 Republic of Moldova
- 4 Malta
- 5 Tajikistan
- 6 IPPF European Network
- 7 ILC Global Alliance