

Regional Conference on International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD)

“Population and Development: Ensuring Rights and Choices”

Opening remarks

Tatiana Molcean, Executive Secretary, UNECE

Thursday 19 October 2023, 10:00, Room XVIII

Dear Ms. Keita, Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund;

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Civil society partners,

Youth representatives,

Colleagues and friends,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you today, together with our partner UNFPA, to the Regional Conference on ICPD – “Population and Development: Ensuring Rights and Choices”.

This conference comes at a critical time. As we approach the 30th anniversary of the adoption of the ICPD Programme of Action in Cairo 1994, we also mark the halfway point to the deadline set for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These milestones provide important opportunities to reflect on our progress towards people-centred development. But they also remind us of ongoing and emerging challenges facing ICPD and SDG implementation in our countries.

In the five years since the last regional conference, the UNECE region has changed profoundly. The COVID-19 pandemic has had far-reaching and long-lasting impacts on people and economies. Devastating natural disasters have created large-scale humanitarian and economic

crises. Military conflicts have taken thousands of lives, caused untold destruction, and displaced millions of people.

These crises threaten the hard-won progress the region has made towards ensuring individual choices, guaranteeing human rights, and moving towards inclusive and sustainable development.

The UNECE region remains at the forefront of global demographic transformation. Most countries are facing (or will soon face) declining fertility, ageing populations and projected population decline. These changes present challenges, but they also present opportunities. The ICPD Programme of Action provides an essential roadmap for policy approaches that capitalize on the potential of individuals, and strengthen societies amid new demographic realities.

Over the next two days, we will reflect on the gains we've made, discuss how recent crises have disrupted progress, identify the areas where acceleration of efforts is required, and explore how countries across the region are responding to long-standing and emerging issues. These discussions will be informed by the Regional Report on the Implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action in the UNECE region. The Report was prepared together with UNFPA and will be presented later this morning. It shows overall improvements in most areas. But it also reveals that progress continues to be uneven within and across countries. Multiple and overlapping forms of inequality and discrimination continue to prevent individuals from realizing their full potential, even in countries where significant progress has taken place. And progress at the regional level masks large disparities across countries in some areas. The diversity of the UNECE region is one of its greatest strengths, and my hope for the next two days is that our exchange of experiences will help to bridge these gaps.

I am very pleased to see that such a large number of delegates are here to assess progress, identify gaps, and recommit to implementing the ICPD Programme of Action at this critical moment. In the room this morning, we have delegations from 38 UNECE member States, representatives from civil society, research and international organisations, including representatives of diverse groups whose needs and interests are at the core of the ICPD Programme of Action: youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, and ethnic minorities.

I thank you again for being here and for demonstrating a belief in the potential of individuals, a commitment to human rights, and a vision for sustainable and inclusive development that leaves no one behind.