



Outcome document

Arab Regional Conference on Population and Development: Challenges and Prospects Ten Years after the 2013 Cairo Declaration

United Nations House, Beirut, 13–14 September 2023

Summary

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund's Arab States Regional Office (UNFPA ASRO) and the League of Arab States, and in partnership with the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) – Arab World Region, organized the Arab Regional Conference on Population and Development: Challenges and Prospects Ten Years after the 2013 Cairo Declaration, on 13 and 14 September 2023.

The Conference aimed to provide a platform that allowed Arab States and all stakeholders to monitor progress on population and development issues since the 2013 Cairo Declaration, identify emerging trends, share successful experiences, highlight challenges faced in fulfilling commitments, and propose actionable policy solutions to accelerate the implementation of the 2013 Cairo Declaration.

The Conference concluded with an outcome document including key messages that emanated from Arab Governments and various stakeholders during the Conference sessions and recommendations that emerged from three stakeholder consultations organized in May and June 2023. The outcome document offered guidance for the Arab region and a roadmap aimed at accelerating the implementation of commitments under the 2013 Cairo Declaration. This document, together with the findings of the regional review report, will feed into the report of the Secretary-General on "Programmes and interventions assessing the status of implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and its contribution to the follow-up to and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development during the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development".¹

¹ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Commission on Population and Development, fifty-seventh session (2024). Available at <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/events/CPD57>.

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Introduction

1. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund's Arab States Regional Office (UNFPA ASRO) and the League of Arab States, and in partnership with the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) – Arab World Region, organized the Arab Regional Conference on Population and Development: Challenges and Prospects Ten Years after the 2013 Cairo Declaration, which was held at the United Nations House in Beirut on 13 and 14 September 2023.

2. The Conference provided a common platform for the governments of Arab States and all stakeholders to review the achievements of Arab States in implementing the 2013 Cairo Declaration of the Regional Conference on Population and Development in the Arab States (held in Cairo, 24–26 June 2013), and to share lessons learned on population and development issues. It also served as a high-level regional platform to review progress, identify gaps and challenges faced by Arab States in implementing commitments under the 2013 Cairo Declaration, and explore possible policy solutions that would accelerate actions to fulfil those commitments. The 2013 Cairo Declaration addressed development challenges and demographic shifts in a changing Arab world within the framework of the fourth review on the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), adopted in Cairo in 1994. The Programme of Action constituted a turning point in addressing population and development issues as it placed human beings, their dignity and their rights at the core of sustainable development actions and emphasized the role of population policies in empowering individuals, improving their lives and achieving their well-being.

3. The programme of work of the current Conference, held on 13 and 14 September 2023, was divided into ten sessions, during which participants reviewed the Arab region's progress since the adoption of the 2013 Cairo Declaration. Presentations on voluntary national review reports were delivered by 17 Arab countries, addressing challenges, opportunities, successful experiences and lessons learned. During other sessions, participants reviewed key priority areas for population and development in the region according to the 2013 Cairo Declaration, focusing on specific issues such as poverty, inequality and social exclusion; health including sexual and reproductive health, and reproductive rights; gender equality; environmental sustainability and humanitarian crises. They also discussed the enabling environment and means to accelerate progress towards delivering on the promises made under the 2013 Cairo Declaration.

4. Participants in the regional conference, which was the culmination of a series of activities carried out within the framework of the sixth regional review on progress in implementing the ICPD recommendations, concluded with an outcome document including key messages expressed by Arab Governments and other stakeholders during the Conference sessions and the three consultation sessions with parliamentarians, various stakeholders and youth groups organized in May and June 2023. The outcome document, together with the findings of the regional review report on key developments since the last review in 2018,² will feed into the report of the Secretary-General on "Programmes and interventions assessing the status of implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and its contribution to the follow-up to and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development during the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development". The Secretary-General's report will be submitted to the fifty-seventh session of the United Nations Commission on Population and Development that will be held in April 2024, in New York.

² <https://www.unescwa.org/sites/default/files/pubs/pdf/sixth-review-international-conference-population-development-arab-region-english.pdf>.



I. Key messages of the Arab Regional Conference on Population and Development

A. Dignity and equality

5. Adopt and implement laws, policies and strategies aimed at promoting the proper role of the family, achieving gender equality, and empowering women and girls in line with international and regional standards to ensure their access to equal opportunities and eliminate discrimination and gender-based violence, including domestic violence, sexual violence, harassment in all settings, technology-facilitated violence, and harmful practices such as child marriage, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.
6. Mainstream gender equality in poverty reduction efforts, continue to invest in the education of women and girls, and adopt gender-sensitive budgets to implement economic and social policies aimed at integrating women into the labour market, ensuring equal pay, and reducing and redistributing unpaid care and domestic work.
7. Prioritize investment in youth by enhancing their participation in public life and their contribution to sustainable development, peace and security, and by developing policies that ensure quality analytical education, capacity-building and life skills, including those responsive to the labour market requirements and the Fourth and Fifth Industrial Revolutions.
8. Strengthen programmes and strategies for older persons, reform social protection policies to promote inclusiveness and access to comprehensive life-cycle health services for all older persons, protect older persons from neglect and abuse and provide them with a decent life.
9. Maximize efforts to realize the rights of persons with disabilities to access inclusive education and an appropriate curriculum, employment opportunities, an adequate standard of living, quality health services, including sexual and reproductive health services, psychosocial support, social protection and access to a built and digital environment, assistive devices and assistive technology.

B. Sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights

10. Promote investment in sexual and reproductive health, family planning and reproductive rights at all stages of life, especially for women, girls, youth, persons with disabilities, migrants, refugees and marginalized groups, empowering them to make informed decisions and improving their safe access to family planning services.
11. Address challenges to the availability of sexual, reproductive and family planning information and services for youth and adolescents.
12. Integrate sexual and reproductive health services into universal health coverage, invest in the workforce in this area, strengthen the role of midwives and build their capacity, and align national efforts with the regional nursing and midwifery strategy to provide high-quality sexual and reproductive health and family planning services, especially in conflict-affected areas.
13. Adequately engage different social sectors, address the social determinants of health and include them in relevant policies, strategies and programmes to address the linkages between inequalities in sexual and reproductive health, family planning and natural resources and challenges to achieving the Cairo Declaration goals and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

C. Crises and mobility

14. Include migration dynamics and migrants in risk reduction strategies, to protect their rights and anticipate the consequences of external shocks, including political, social, economic and environmental shocks, and their multiplier effect on the most vulnerable groups.
15. Integrate risk prevention and crisis response concepts and mechanisms into development planning and build on past experiences in dealing with and preparing to respond to crises at the local level to enhance the resilience of societies to multiple crises, ensuring the continued achievement of population and development goals and building sustainable and resilient societies.

D. Place and environmental sustainability

16. Adopt inclusive and participatory urban planning models that seek to achieve cities' sustainability, and develop and implement gender-sensitive climate action policies that take into account population structures and the rights and needs of all, especially marginalized groups.
17. Provide affordable technologies for climate change action to least developed countries (LDCs), small farmers and low-income people.
18. Build partnerships with the private sector and expand investment in the green economy in light of the growing demand for green products, and capitalize on this opportunity to create jobs while delivering on climate and sustainability goals.

E. Mechanisms to accelerate implementation

19. Intensify efforts to change negative societal attitudes towards different population groups, emphasize the positive contributions of persons with disabilities and older persons to their communities, combat discrimination against them, remove structural barriers that encourage gender discrimination and all forms of violence through school curricula, and promote the role of traditional and new media and community leaders in building a positive narrative on different population groups and their issues.
20. Adopt inclusive national policies that integrate the different population dimensions in their interaction with each other, while ensuring necessary and effective sustainable institutional frameworks and budgets, mainstreaming rights-based approaches, and strengthening the rule of law, governance institutions and multisectoral coordination.
21. Work with multiple stakeholders, including community-based civil society organizations, and women's, youth, persons with disabilities and older persons' organizations, and enhance their potential to contribute to the development, implementation and evaluation of population policies, and national and local planning including priority-setting and participatory budgeting.
22. Promote regional collaboration and exchange of information, and strengthen cooperation in developing and implementing regional solutions to cross-border challenges, including forced displacement, climate change, water scarcity and food insecurity, ensuring better migration governance, combating human trafficking and improving the developmental returns of migration for both sending and receiving countries.
23. Intensify collaboration and joint programming among donors and respective international and regional organizations to avoid redundancy of efforts, increase the efficiency of funding needed to strengthen institutional capacities, and develop and implement population and development programmes in the region, especially in LDCs.

24. Ensure that development financing keeps up with the increasing pace of the requirements of the Population and Development Programme of Action and SDGs, while directing national financing towards the implementation of the 2013 Cairo Declaration goals, establishing regional financing funds allocated to specific issues, and ensuring that donor countries implement their commitments to LDCs and to countries facing economic challenges as a result of regional and global crises, rising food and energy prices, and climate change.

25. Enhance institutional capacities and leverage modern technology and digital transformation in the collection, analysis and dissemination of disaggregated data and statistics related to population and development, population and housing censuses; develop a framework to monitor the achievement of the 2013 Cairo Declaration goals; link it to the goals and indicators of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to the Population Development Composite Index; and invest in national and regional research to support evidence-based policymaking.

II. Sessions and presentations

26. The ten plenary sessions of the Conference, in addition to the opening, preliminary and closing sessions, revolved around the main theme of the Conference, namely addressing challenges and prospects ten years after the 2013 Cairo Declaration. The following sections summarize each session and the related topics of discussion.

A. Opening session

27. The opening session began with a short video presentation that reviewed the various stages leading up to the present Conference, notably the International Conference on Population and Development in 1994 and the resulting Cairo Programme of Action, which placed human rights principles at the core of policies aimed at achieving sustainable development, and enshrined the role of population dynamics, gender equality and reproductive health rights; and the Cairo Declaration of 2013, which affirmed the commitment of Arab countries to the population and development agenda and aimed to achieve sustainable development amid regional challenges.

28. At the opening session, statements were delivered by Ms. Rola Dashti, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCWA, Ms. Natalia Kanem, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Director of the UNFPA, Ms. Haifa Abu-Ghazaleh, Assistant Secretary-General and Head of the Social Affairs Sector at the League of Arab States, Ms. Fadoua Bakhadda, Regional Director of the IPPF – Arab World Region, and Mr. Hector Hajjar, Minister of Social Affairs of Lebanon.

29. At the outset, the speakers extended their deepest condolences to the victims of the tragic earthquake that struck Morocco and the devastating floods that swept Libya. They expressed their sincere sorrow for the thousands of victims and missing persons and stressed their strong solidarity with both countries.

30. In her speech, Ms. Rola Dashti noted that the promises made by States to their people in the 2013 Cairo Declaration – to provide equal access to services, give young people a space to unleash their potential, ensure gender equality, preserve the dignity of older persons, and empower persons with disabilities – did not properly materialize. Meanwhile, there were pervasive conflicts, widespread poverty, worsening inequality, decline in gender equality index, high numbers of displaced people and refugees, worsening youth unemployment, a widening gender gap, exclusion of persons with disabilities, lack of access by older persons to their full rights, the prevalence of early marriage and school dropout, and the inability of all women to obtain their reproductive health rights. These realities were compounded by the climate change problem, which significantly affected various vulnerable groups, deepening inequalities and insecurity in the light of weak good governance, lack

of data and indicators, poor coordination between stakeholders and low funding. Therefore, the Executive Secretary of ESCWA called for building a sustainable environment conducive to achieving equality, enabling all groups to contribute to their societies, achieving the SDGs and building resilient societies. Ms. Dashti concluded her speech by stressing the need to strengthen multilateral partnerships within countries and foster regional and international cooperation to bring about the desired change.

31. Ms. Natalia Kanem reviewed the significant positive changes that the Arab region had witnessed over the past 30 years, such as rising life expectancy, decreasing maternal mortality and strengthened reproductive health options. She also mentioned the wide disparity in those achievements between and within Arab countries, which was constantly exacerbated by overlapping crises and emerging megatrends such as conflict, the lasting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and climate change and natural disasters that continued to fuel gender-based violence, and undermine the ability of women and girls to protect their rights. She also highlighted the issue of refugee and displaced women, who had poor access to sexual and reproductive health services, and the increasing risks that surrounded them such as violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, and forced child marriage. She noted the need to invest in women's and girls' health, education, rights and agency to pave the way for gender equality and achieve progress and prosperity in societies. Ms. Kanem underscored the need to eliminate economic, social and environmental barriers that constrained the potential of women and youth in the region. In conclusion, she reviewed some interventions that would contribute to progress, including strengthening political will, empowering women and youth, improving data collection and analysis, integrating the health and safety needs of women and girls into preparedness, response and recovery plans, and placing women and youth at the centre of efforts aimed at mitigating and adapting to climate change.

32. Ms. Haifa Abu-Ghazaleh stated that the Conference improved the understanding of the interlinkage and complementarity between the 1994 ICPD Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. She pointed out the progress revealed by the review, most notably the decline in infant mortality rates, the improvement of reproductive health conditions, and the increase in school enrolment rates. Ms. Abu-Ghazaleh noted that those achievements were still piecemeal and inconsistent between countries and between regions within the same country. She stated that many other problems emerged in addition to already existing challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and demographic shifts. Addressing those problems would require a harmonious and dynamic balance between population and development, coherence in common Arab interests, commitment to collective action and robust coordination. The League of Arab States had intensified its efforts to respond to those challenges: the establishment of the Arab Council for Population and Development in 2019 to implement the 1994 ICPD Programme of Action and the 2013 Cairo Declaration, and the designation of 28 October of each year as the Arab Day for Population and Development were all prominent signs of commitment and coordination, in addition to the League's interest in addressing youth issues, developing the Arab Strategy for Youth, Peace and Security, and holding forums targeting youth and civil society on the sidelines of the Arab Economic and Social Development Summit.

33. Ms. Fadoua Bakhadda pointed out the importance of the Conference in providing an opportunity to exchange views on the challenges faced by Arab countries in various fields such as education, humanitarian crises and rapid technological transformations. She addressed reproductive and sexual health and the consequent barriers, the difficulty faced by young people to access reproductive health care services, the lack of attention by older persons to their sexual health, the spread of violence and epidemics, the weakening human immune system, and unsafe abortion, which was the leading cause of maternal mortality, in addition to barriers hindering women's access to sexual and reproductive health services, and to proper nutrition. Those hurdles were compounded by emerging challenges such as climate change, natural disasters, wars and the ensuing displacement and socioeconomic problems. Stakeholders should therefore intensify their efforts to achieve the development goals in their respective fields of competence, by strengthening the complementary and participatory role of civil society, enforcing good governance in development policymaking, and

emphasizing cooperation with various stakeholders seeking to strengthen the proactive role of young people, listening to their views and expressing their sexual health needs.

34. Mr. Hector Hajjar stressed the need to prepare operational and strategic plans for population and development that would preserve each country's cultural, demographic and historical specificity. He pointed out the need to provide care for vulnerable groups in society such as homeless children, school dropouts, orphans, older persons, the sick, the poor and persons with disabilities, and to integrate them effectively into society. He also referred to the problem of rapid population growth in the Arab region, especially in Lebanon, which was already weighed down by the burden of displacement and aggravated youth migration with its detrimental effects on production. He concluded his remarks by underlining Lebanon's commitment to the ICPD Programme of Action and the 2030 SDGs, stressing the need to pursue efforts at the levels of strategic follow-up and planning, and to ensure social stability.

B. Preliminary session

35. The preliminary session included the presentation of the findings of the regional review report on the progress made by the Arab region in implementing the 2013 Cairo Declaration.

36. The session was moderated by Ms. Haifa Abu-Ghazaleh, who pointed out that interest in population and humanitarian issues in the Arab region had declined due to the complex problems afflicting the region. However, those issues regained the attention of stakeholders, including the League of Arab States, as evidenced by the recent conference held in Cairo and its decisions. The most prominent of those decisions recommended strengthening the role of the National Population Council, improving comprehensive cooperation between government institutions, and convening the International Conference on Health and Development. She also commended the efforts of some Arab States in developing population policies.

37. Ms. Mehrinaz El-Awady, Leader of the Gender Justice, Population and Inclusive Development Cluster at ESCWA, provided an overview of the sixth ICPD regional review process in the Arab region. She began her intervention by stressing the importance of the ICPD and the themes covered by the 2013 Cairo Declaration. She added that countries were unable to ward off the challenges that had rapidly exacerbated since the 2013 Cairo Declaration, pointing to the most important data and statistics that included poverty, youth unemployment, debt, the high proportion of migrants and refugees in the Arab region, the poor political participation of women, violence against women, and water scarcity. She also stressed the need to recognize and address the various needs and constraints facing older persons, and persons with disabilities in addition to children and women among migrants and refugees. Ms. Al Awady reviewed the three main elements of the regional review, namely the regional consultations and dialogues with stakeholders, the support to member States in preparing the national review, and the submission of the regional report to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, which would be presented at the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on Population and Development. She also briefly presented the stages of completion of the regional review between 2022 and 2024, and ESCWA methodology of work in the areas of development and population.

38. Ms. Laila Baker, Regional Director of the UNFPA ASRO, reviewed the main achievements and recommendations contained in the sixth review report of the ICPD in the Arab region: Ten years after the 2013 Cairo Declaration, which was prepared by ESCWA in cooperation with the UNFPA and the League of Arab States. She pointed to improved political will, which translated into better achievements in advancing the economic empowerment of women and girls, and their integration into the labour market; promoting inclusive social and economic development in the region; expanding public policies and services in the areas of sexual and reproductive health; strengthening laws on gender-based violence; decreasing child marriage rates in some Arab countries; and strengthening initiatives in support of the rights of persons with disabilities, older persons and young people so that no one would be left behind. In the framework of achieving the ICPD vision and the

SDGs, Ms. Baker reviewed priorities, which were mainly focused on building institutional capacity and achieving efficient resource allocation; investing in research and data analysis as an approach to effective programming and policymaking; investing in partnerships with civil society and the private sector; adopting a participatory approach to policy formulation; incorporating a gender perspective into development policies; implementing new legislation to eliminate gender-based discrimination and violence; strengthening governance systems based on the rights and needs of different population groups; integrating sexual and reproductive health services into universal health coverage programmes without any discrimination; and addressing cross-border challenges through regional dialogues, collaboration with partners and exchange of expertise within and outside the region.

C. Plenary sessions

1. *Session I and II: Ten years after the 2013 Cairo Declaration: voluntary reporting by member States*

39. The first and second plenary sessions focused on the progress made by member States in implementing the Cairo Declaration ten years after its adoption in 2013.

40. Ms. Chouaa Dassouki, Minister Plenipotentiary and Director of the Population Policies Department at the League of Arab States, moderated both sessions. The representatives of Algeria, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, the State of Palestine, Qatar, Somalia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen delivered presentations and reports on progress made in the implementation of the recommendations of the Cairo Declaration on Population and Development, focusing on challenges, successful experiences, existing and emerging priorities and lessons learned.

41. The national representatives agreed that the regional review was conducted under challenging circumstances exacerbated by the compounding impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the adverse effects of climate change, political instability in the region, global economic challenges, the repercussions of the war in Ukraine, and displacement crises. Despite these circumstances, however, States succeeded in achieving some breakthroughs in various areas, albeit in varying degrees, but those achievements still fell short of the desired objectives and further efforts were required. The most notable achievements focused on education, reproductive and sexual health, women's empowerment, population strategies and national policies that were sensitive to population issues. The presentations also highlighted the common challenges faced by Arab States, including the lack of data and statistics and the need to develop them and to invest in them as well as internal and external displacement resulting from conflicts and climate-driven factors. All those challenges placed an additional burden, in varying proportions, on those economies that were already weighed down by a significantly overwhelming reality.

42. The presentations also stressed the importance of partnerships, whether at the local level, in the form of cooperation between government institutions, civil society organizations and the private sector, or at the regional and international levels to accelerate the implementation of the Cairo Declaration commitments, achieve climate sustainability, keep pace with digital transformation, and address the problem of displacement. Speakers emphasized that countries needed to be guided, according to their needs, by the positive achievements, practices and experiences of other countries within the Arab region.

43. The presentations were followed by a discussion during which participants shared their insights and suggestions. The representative of Algeria expressed the importance of population plans in his country, as they were enshrined by several articles of the 2020 Constitution dealing with women's affairs and rights to health, and children's rights. The representative of Tunisia noted that countries whose economic activities were largely responsible for climate change impacts were bound to shoulder their responsibilities, fulfil their pledges and provide assistance to the affected countries.

The representative of Jordan pointed out that the upcoming phase would be dominated by artificial intelligence, which might substitute some jobs, and wondered if Arab States had envisaged some arrangements and strategies to solve the potential problems emerging from that phase. Some participants asked about how population strategies could be implemented and financed so that they did not remain unfulfilled. The representative of Yemen mentioned the need for political will prior to funding, and the representative of Egypt added that strategies were rarely implemented in their entirety, but an implementation ratio of 60 per cent was acceptable. Participants also stressed the importance of concerted efforts within the same country to implement strategies, noting that coordination should be prioritized, followed by the necessary funding allocation.³

2. Key messages from the regional multi-stakeholder consultations on the ten-year review of the 2013 Cairo Declaration⁴

44. The session was moderated by Ms. Salma El-Nims, Senior Social Affairs Officer in the Gender Justice, Population and Inclusive Development Cluster at ESCWA. The session was an open platform for stakeholders to present the outcomes of regional consultations organized during the ICPD regional review that preceded the Arab Regional Conference.

45. Ms. Najat Saliba, a member of the Lebanese Parliament, presented the key messages of the regional dialogue with Arab parliamentarians. She pointed out that challenges arising from population issues were not limited to one country or a specific group, but affected all societies, hence the need for continuous, systematic and coordinated efforts to develop Arab societies in tandem with the necessary legislation. She also highlighted a range of scientific achievements and sustainable solutions that the Arab region had brought forward despite its multiple challenges, notably technological development, the launch of the Falcon 9 rocket by the United Arab Emirates in March 2023, the participation of an Emirati astronaut in a journey to space, the establishment of smart sustainable cities such as Al-Ula and Casablanca, the implementation of sustainable projects in the Arabian Gulf aimed at regulating the production of dates, the organization of international activities such as the Qatar World Cup and the Climate Change Conference in Sharm El-Sheikh (COP27), and the progress made by women in the economic and political spheres. Ms. Saliba listed some of the approaches that parliamentarians could adopt to strengthen oversight of population and development legislation and reforms, and then read out the recommendations reached by the participants in the Arab Parliamentary Dialogue on the sixth regional review of the ICPD, which was held online on 11 May 2023. Those recommendations were classified into four categories: emphasizing the follow-up to the goals of the ICPD Programme of Action and the 2013 Cairo Declaration, the importance of parliamentary action in achieving those goals and the development of relevant legislation; addressing the repercussions of the global, regional and national challenges faced by Arab countries during the past years; and rethinking population priorities and approaches needed to achieve population and development goals.

46. Ms. Limiaa Abdelgafar Khalafalla, Programme Director at the Sudan Family Planning Association, presented the key messages from the multi-stakeholder dialogue on the sixth regional review of the ICPD Programme of Action, which was held online on 1 June 2023. She began her intervention by identifying stakeholders, namely civil society organizations, including youth and women's organizations, the private sector and research and academic institutions concerned with population, human rights and development issues in the Arab region. She then listed the most prominent recommendations, including recognizing the role of civil society organizations in the provision of health and humanitarian services, developing and strengthening multilateral partnerships, and activating the role of civil society in the development of legislation.

³ Some of the reports and presentations are available on the Conference website at <https://www.unescwa.org/events/challenges-prospects-2013-cairo-declaration>.

⁴ The key messages and recommendations are available on the Conference website at <https://www.unescwa.org/events/challenges-prospects-2013-cairo-declaration>.

47. Mr. Ahmed Ammar Abdelzaher, a trainer and member of the International Youth Peer Education (Y-PEER) Network in Tunisia, presented the key messages from the Regional Consultation for Adolescents and Youth on the sixth regional review of the ICPD Programme of Action, which was held in Tunisia on 22 and 23 June 2023 in collaboration with the UNFPA- ASRO, the League of Arab States, the IPPF – Arab World Region, the Arab Institute for Human Rights, and the Y-PEER Network. At the outset, he pointed out that the youth of the Arab region joined hands and mobilized their efforts in support of the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. He called on the youth of the Arab region, member States, governments, civil society, international organizations, the United Nations and other decision-makers to scale up efforts to implement the recommendations emanating from the Regional Consultation. To achieve that goal, all stakeholders must be involved in the formulation of sustainable development policies and in the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action and the 2013 Cairo Declaration.

3. *Session IV: Human rights, dignity and achieving equality: priorities, challenges and prospects in the Arab region*

48. Focusing on issues of dignity and equality in the Arab region, participants discussed priorities to be addressed, including the promotion of human rights-based approaches and the implications of inequality, exclusion and discrimination. They also presented some promising practices and possible policy solutions to ensure a more dignified life for all.

49. The session was moderated by Ms. Hanin Abu Ghosh, a journalist and motivational speaker from the State of Palestine, who posed a series of questions to Mr. Khalid Abu-Ismaïl, Senior Economist at ESCWA, Mr. Zafiris Tzannatos, Economist and Senior Consultant for Development Strategy and Social Policy in Jordan, Ms. Lina Abou-Habib, Director of the Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship at the American University of Beirut, Mr. Christopher McIvor, Regional Representative for the Middle East and Eurasia at HelpAge International in Jordan, and Mr. Ghassan Sabri, a sign language trainer at the Higher Institute of Human Sciences in Tunisia. Her questions revolved around several topics including poverty and inequality challenges considered as fundamental barriers to sustainable development efforts; innovative policy tools available to address those challenges in different contexts; decent work conditions and equality; inclusion of older persons as positive contributors to development efforts; harnessing technology to enhance access to education and employment for persons with disabilities; achieving gender equality and addressing discrimination against women; and empowering youth and promoting youth entrepreneurship and participation in public life.

50. In response to those questions, the speakers noted that the Arab region still faced two main challenges, poverty and inequality, albeit in varying proportions depending on the measurement tools and the type of indicators used, whether quantitative, qualitative, single or composite. Multiple causes underpinned poverty, the most prominent of which were conflicts and the difficult conditions plaguing Arab countries. Those causes must therefore be identified, understood and addressed with adequate remedies. Participants also stressed the importance of approaching unemployment not by limiting it to a specific population group, such as youth or women, but by addressing it from a general perspective. While progress was made in some sectors and some legal amendments were introduced, indicators of violence against women remained high, particularly among migrant and refugee women. The role of women as caregivers was still unrecognized and their participation in political and economic activities was timid. Therefore, a new social contract must be forged, some aspects/norms of the social system impeding women's equal and non-discriminatory access to opportunities must be changed, and further progress must be made towards gender equality, freedom and accountability to advance the status of women. Responses also focused on the need to raise older persons' awareness of their rights, and enhance their interaction with young people owing to the mutual benefit of that relationship as young people would improve their communication skills and older persons would acquire technological skills to access important information platforms, especially health-related ones. The panellists stressed the importance of disseminating knowledge among persons with disabilities by all available means, leveraging technology to enhance their

abilities and independence, and enabling them to access education, job opportunities and information, especially with regard to their rights and services available to them.

4. *Session V: High-level panel on achievements in population policies: linkages and contributions to the socioeconomic development agenda*

51. The session brought together high-level policymakers who examined the experiences, achievements and challenges of their countries in formulating and implementing population policies and in integrating population issues into public policies and development plans.

52. The session was moderated by Ms. Maha El Rabbat, former Minister of Health and Population in Egypt and Professor of Public Health at Cairo University. The moderator addressed a set of questions to Ms. Mouna Osman Aden, Minister of Women in Djibouti, Mr. Mohamed Elmi Ibrahim, Minister of Labour and Social Affairs in Somalia, Mr. Mohamad Ali Tamim, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Planning of Iraq, Mr. Hector Hajjar, Minister of Social Affairs in Lebanon, Mr. Mohamed Youssef Al-Zidani, Acting Minister of Planning in Libya, and Mr. Qassem Mohammed Bahaibah, Minister of Public Health and Population in Yemen.

53. The general question revolved around measures aimed at achieving complementarity and coherence between population policies and other public policies to advance sustainable development actions. Those measures included youth employment and education; key achievements in the implementation of population policies and related challenges; partnerships and cooperation at the regional and international levels to develop population policies; the role of technology in improving policies; and strategies adopted in engaging civil society and other stakeholders.

54. In response to those questions, the panellists reviewed a range of government policies and plans that the Arab States had developed to enhance youth access to the labour market, improve social justice and empower women. They also stressed the importance of international partnerships, particularly in post-conflict countries, and partnerships with regional organizations, notably ESCWA and the League of Arab States, to advance population issues in the region. They also tackled the incompatibility of educational curricula with labour market needs in the Arab region, stressing the need to change that reality to prevent Arab countries from becoming exporters of skilled labour. In another context, the panellists emphasized that Arab countries should not remain recipients of technology, and that efforts to automate and develop electronic platforms should not be deployed by countries individually. Instead, the use of technology should be unified within the Arab region, commensurate with its needs. They also noted that the Arab region's pace towards achieving the SDGs was slow owing to its problems which outweighed its efforts, albeit in varying proportions from country to country. Those problems emerged on several levels, the most prominent of which were probably the lack of required attention to human capital, the weak coordination between civil society organizations and State institutions, and the lack of consideration of the actual needs of Arab society by international institutions, which were developing programmes heedless of the region's profile and based on the successful experiences of countries outside the region. Speakers also addressed the problem posed by the huge number of displaced persons in the Arab region and the ensuing challenges for population policies, especially in the light of the dwindling support of donor countries to the Middle East region following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine.

5. *Session VI: Sexual and reproductive health for all: a priority for delivering on the ICPD promise*

55. The session addressed the social determinants of health, the importance of sexual and reproductive health for all, the related challenges and the urgent need to develop sexual and reproductive health care policies and systems that responded to the needs of population. Participants also addressed the social and cultural barriers to access services and information related to sexual

and reproductive health and rights, as well as the need for a comprehensive approach that addressed healthy life cycle priorities for all population groups.

56. The session was moderated by Ms. Hoda Rashad, Director of the Social Research Center at the American University in Cairo. She addressed a set of questions to Mr. Faysal El Kak, Senior Lecturer and Director of the Women Integrated Sexual Health (WISH) Program at the American University of Beirut, Ms. Hajer Chehbi, Executive Director of the Arab Institute for Human Rights in Tunisia, Ms. Ifrah Ahmed, Founder and Programme Director of Ifrah Foundation in Ireland, Mr. Mohamed Afifi, Regional Advisor for Women's Health at the World Health Organization, and Ms. Hala Youssef, Regional Sexual and Reproductive Health Advisor at the UNFPA.

57. The questions revolved around a variety of topics, most notably priorities and strategies related to reducing maternal mortality; ensuring universal health coverage; combating unequal access to family planning services; addressing the impact of acute and protracted humanitarian crises on sexual and reproductive health outcomes; identifying social determinants for achieving sexual and reproductive health for all; engaging actors in addressing social determinants; enhancing access to services; providing a legal environment to empower youth and equip them with the necessary capacity to access services and information related to sexual and reproductive health; addressing the role of midwives; and fighting harmful traditional practices.

58. In their responses, participants noted that most maternal deaths occurred due to insufficient preparedness to deal with sometimes minor cases. It was therefore necessary to invest in health systems, identify gaps and needs, and assess the readiness of hospitals to receive cases, especially from vulnerable and marginalized groups, and the extent to which medical staff had the necessary skills to deal with those cases. As for midwives, participants noted a great disparity between countries in the Arab region in terms of qualifying and training midwives, and providing them with social protection through a special legal system, in addition to the fact that society tended to turn to specialized doctors rather than midwives. Therefore, there was a need to change society's perception of the role of midwives, and to unify concepts related to their qualification and training. Panellists also mentioned that conflicts, economic and social structures and the lack of means to upgrade reproductive and sexual health in plans and policies had prevented progress in that area and had led to significant disparities between countries and within the same country between rich and poor, and between urban and rural areas.

59. In a related context, the participants highlighted the need to place the medical sector at the core of strategies aimed at promoting people's health and safety, thus promoting the health sector's leading role. Regarding youth and the importance of paying special attention to their sexual and reproductive health, speakers explained that young people constituted the future workforce and human resources in Arab countries. As a result, their health should be protected by ensuring their access to the necessary health care services and enhancing their awareness of the protection from sexual violence and exploitation, and therefore from sexually transmitted diseases. As for harmful practices, such as female genital mutilation and early marriage, awareness-raising campaigns, workshops and other activities were needed along with high-level commitment to combat such practices. For the assessment of progress, participants highlighted the need to provide the necessary data and to adopt an index composed of several indicators that would consider the specificity of regions. In the same vein, donors should provide targeted funding for programmes to ensure their viability, irrespective of the authority in charge of their implementation.

6. *Session VII: Environmental sustainability and population dynamics: priorities for planning a better future for all*

60. Addressing the linkages between environmental sustainability and the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action in the region, panellists identified key trends and challenges associated with climate change and environmental degradation, and discussed ways to integrate population and

environmental considerations into resilience, adaptation and development planning in support of population groups, especially the most vulnerable.

61. The session was moderated by Mr. Mohammad Asfour, Environmental Sustainability Consultant in Jordan. A set of questions was addressed to Ms. Roula Majdalani, Senior Climate Advisor at the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) in Lebanon, Mr. Maged Osman, Executive Director at Baseera Center in Egypt, Ms. Meghna Ranganathan, Social Epidemiologist focused on gender-based violence at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine in the United Kingdom, and Ms. Maysoun Ibrahim, President of the Palestinian Syndicate for Information Sciences and Technology (PALIST) and expert in information and communication technology for development.

62. The questions revolved around several topics, most notably environmental sustainability and climate change challenges in the Arab region; the impact of climate change on access to sexual and reproductive health services and gender-based violence; the role of technology and innovation in promoting sustainable development; community engagement in decision-making and environmental sustainability initiatives; and women's participation in the development and implementation of climate change solutions.

63. In response to those questions, panellists pointed out that population challenges facing the Arab region lied mostly in population growth that exceeded available resources, and in rapid demographic transformation and political instability. All those challenges combined with climate change effects negatively affected the possibility of achieving sustainable population growth. While climate change affected everyone without exception, it disproportionately impacted the most vulnerable, such as the poor and farmers. To mitigate those impacts, all available means must be used, including notably technology, such as renewable energy, seawater desalination, wastewater treatment and rainwater harvesting. They also pointed to the shift towards green economy, which represented an opportunity to solve climate and environmental problems, and address youth unemployment. Speakers noted the importance of safe access to information that would provide an opportunity for all to express their views in the search for solutions, participate in public policymaking and adopt participatory methods in the formulation and implementation of policies and programmes, including participatory budgeting. Access to funding for projects and plans to combat climate change should also be provided by building the capacity to attract funding and prepare comprehensive project proposals for submission to donors.

64. Speakers also stressed the importance of developing national strategies for reducing the effects of disasters, which should be accompanied by the necessary implementation mechanisms and strong political will. They highlighted the need to engage women in programming efforts and to train them accordingly as they were usually among the first responders in disaster situations. They also touched on the impact of climate change on other crises in the Arab region, namely migration and conflict.

7. Session VIII: The impact of humanitarian crises on population and development

65. Participants in the session focused on analysing the cumulative impact of various crises, such as occupation, protracted conflict, political instability, the COVID-19 pandemic, infectious diseases outbreaks, and the effects of natural disasters on population and development, especially on the most vulnerable.

66. The session was moderated by Ms. Shatha El-Nakib, Research Scientist at the Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health, who posed a series of questions to Ms. Rania Abu El-Hassan, Director of Member Associations Support and Development at the IPPF, Ms. Samar Muhareb, Lawyer and Director of the Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development Association in Jordan, Ms. Sarah Bader, Official Spokesperson of the World Youth Forum and Regional Focal Point in the Middle

East and North Africa for the United Nations Major Group for Children and Youth in Egypt, Mr. Mustafa Barghouti, Member of the Legislative Council in the State of Palestine, and Mr. Nadim Farajalla, Director of the Climate Change and Environment Program at the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut.

67. The questions addressed important topics including the availability and accessibility of family planning services during crises; the exacerbated vulnerabilities of women and girls during crises; youth and children in the context of humanitarian crises; the availability of natural resources and food security and their implications for violence against women, migration and forced displacement in humanitarian crises; harnessing the potential of young people to engage them in humanitarian preparedness and response efforts; the role of partnership between governments and civil society in improving crisis response; and adaptation measures to improve community resilience during crises.

68. In their responses to questions, speakers noted an increased need for family planning methods during humanitarian crises, stressing that States must therefore be prepared to provide minimum sexual and reproductive health services. They also addressed the climate change-forced displacement-food security nexus, and reviewed the following adaptation measures: education, for raising the awareness of individuals about those risks; early warning systems; cooperation and integration with neighbouring countries to secure the necessary food production; and leveraging partnerships and promoting resilient systems, strong databases and evidence-based adjustment of data. Speakers also pointed to the opportunity to learn from crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which underscored the important role of local governments and civil society organizations during crises. They noted that the impact of humanitarian crises was often more severe on women, youth and children as they lacked access to health care and basic services, and risked exploitation and deprivation of education. Speakers agreed that the humanitarian crises in the Arab region hindered progress towards the implementation of the 2013 Cairo Declaration commitments, as they aggravated poverty, disease and gender-based violence, and caused regression in social services. They emphasized the need to provide young people with the necessary education owing to their important role in preparedness and response efforts, organize training courses to enhance their skills and information, and advocate policies and initiatives that would enhance preparedness capabilities. Civil society also played a key role in that regard, being the most prominent lever to address crises; hence the need for strengthened interaction between governments and local communities within the same country, and for enhanced cooperation among Arab countries to develop joint mechanisms aimed at addressing forced or voluntary migration issues resulting from climate change. Speakers focused on the need to develop a mechanism that would grant a decent life to refugees and displaced persons, provide a sense of ownership for communities in determining their needs away from external interference, promote self-financing, and improve the organization of international aid to serve the basic interest of society.

8. *Session IX: Ten years after the 2013 Cairo Declaration: bridging gaps and accelerating progress*

69. Considering the Arab region's slow progress towards achieving the Cairo Declaration, and despite breakthroughs on several fronts, the participants identified ways to address the main bottlenecks. They also explored means of implementation, acceleration, follow-up and review to build the capacity of Arab Governments in fulfilling their commitments to the ICPD goals.

70. The session was moderated by Mr. Ahmed Abdennadher, Population and Development Expert in Tunisia, who posed a series of questions to Ms. Kristonia Lockhart, Lead Gender Specialist at the Islamic Development Bank in Saudi Arabia, Mr. Abdellatif Lfarakh, Statistician and Demographer in Morocco, Ms. Lisa Kolovich, Senior Economist at the International Monetary Fund in the United States of America, and Mr. Rami Khouri, Distinguished Fellow at the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut.

71. The questions addressed a variety of topics, most notably demographic changes and the causes of fertility decline; research and data collection and analysis as an evidence-based policymaking approach to population and development issues; good governance to help achieve the ICPD goals; the constructive use of technology to ensure a rights-based approach to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights; the role of knowledge and technology in empowering women and girls; and strengthening partnerships to achieve development goals in the Arab region.

72. In their responses, speakers focused on the importance of traditional and big data in the development of population policies to ensure their relevance to demographic shifts and to country specificities. Such data should be drawn from a variety of sources, such as birth and death statistics and data on human mobility. The main problem in the Arab region was the lack of data to measure development indicators and the lack of evidence-based data to monitor population changes, in addition to the limited use of advanced technology in data extraction, especially demographic data. The panellists stressed the need to care for older persons, allocate the necessary expenditures for the health and geriatric care sectors, and monitor and prioritize older persons' needs. They also pointed to the important value of citizenship and the need for States to adopt a citizen-centric approach, which would enable citizens to go beyond their role as mere consumers and would encourage them to take initiative and express their opinion. They added that citizens should be involved in the development and implementation of development programmes and policies, stressing that all the above points were a prerequisite for achieving sustainable development. Speakers also focused on the importance of using technology to empower women and facilitate access to information and training courses for hard-to-reach groups. In addition, they emphasized the need to accelerate the development and implementation of public policies and programmes of action, and reiterated the importance of education, financing, economic empowerment, international partnerships, cooperation with civil society and non-governmental organizations, and access to technology.

9. *Session X: Key messages of the 2023 Regional Conference*

73. The session reviewed the key messages reached by participants in the two-day Conference. Ms. Mehrinaz El-Awady read out those messages, which were grouped according to the order of topics discussed at the various sessions. The key messages are set out in the first chapter of the present report.

74. The organizers said that the key messages and recommendations emanating from the presentations, reports and discussions would be included in the outcome document of the Conference, which would be submitted to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs in New York to feed into the report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations on "Programmes and interventions assessing the status of implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and its contribution to the follow-up to and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development during the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development".

D. Closing session

75. The Arab Regional Conference on Population and Development: Challenges and Prospects Ten Years after the 2013 Cairo Declaration closed with a speech by Ms. Natalia Kanem, in her capacity as Executive Director of the UNFPA. She thanked the attendees for their participation and congratulated them on the success of the Conference. Ms. Kanem stressed the organizers' commitment to support Arab States in translating all decisions into concrete actions.

III. Participants

76. The Conference brought together representatives of government institutions, including ministers and high-level officials from relevant ministries and national population councils, and parliamentarians; representatives of civil society organizations, including youth and women-led groups; international and regional organizations; diplomatic missions; United Nations agencies; academia; experts; and representatives of the private sector and donors.

IV. Documents

77. All conference documents, including the 2023 regional review report, the final agenda, national voluntary reports and presentations, can be viewed and downloaded from the ESCWA website: <https://www.unescwa.org/events/challenges-prospects-2013-cairo-declaration>.



Annex I

Population and development in the Arab region: challenges and prospects ten years after the 2013 Cairo Declaration

Dialogue of Arab parliaments on the sixth regional review of the International Conference on Population and Development in the Arab region Online, 11 May 2023

Key messages and recommendations from the Arab parliaments dialogue

The Economic and Social Commission of Western Asia (ESCWA), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the League of Arab States organized the Arab parliaments dialogue on the sixth regional review of the International Conference on Population and Development in the Arab region, online on 11 May 2023. Parliamentarians from 11 Arab countries who are concerned with population and social affairs took part in this dialogue to showcase their parliaments' achievements in implementing the 2013 Cairo Declaration and to discuss the challenges facing their work in this area. The dialogue resulted in the following recommendations and key messages, which will be submitted to the regional review conference to be held in September 2023, in Beirut:

1. Strengthening the role of Arab parliaments in achieving the goals of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action and the 2013 Cairo Declaration and in providing a dignified life for all people and securing their rights.
2. Acknowledging the efforts of Arab parliaments in developing national legislations to protect various population groups and emphasizing the need to continue harmonizing national legislations with the global and regional development frameworks and their recommendations, including the ICDP Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
3. Affirming the pivotal role of parliamentarians in representing people and communicating with them and with various governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, which makes them key partners for achieving development goals for all population groups.
4. Reinforcing the role of parliaments in monitoring government performance and bridging the gap between development policies and implemented programs and practices, to ensure that they respond to the priorities and needs of the population, particularly vulnerable groups.
5. Reconsidering the impacts of the global, regional and national challenges facing Arab countries recently, including conflicts, wars, occupation, the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic set-back and climate change, and re-evaluating the approaches needed for achieving the population and development goals, including those related to protecting the most vulnerable groups, the unmet needs for family planning services, the provision of health and reproductive health services, the eradication of poverty and discrimination, and the migration governance.
6. Rethinking the development approaches adopted by Arab countries following the COVID-19 pandemic which exposed the structural imbalances in various development areas and led to some radical development changes, such as accelerating digital transformation.
7. Affirming that addressing gender issues, supporting women's role in society, securing their rights, including reproductive health rights, and enhancing their political participation are key priorities and prerequisites for achieving sustainable development in the Arab region.
8. Focusing on the social protection system in the Arab countries and reforming it while allocating the required budgets to respond to the priorities of citizens, especially the most vulnerable groups.
9. Reviewing the legislations on universal health coverage and ensuring that they include sexual and reproductive health services, which should be inclusive of all population groups, including youth.

10. Re-examining the population and development priorities in conflict-affected countries, while aiming to respond to the needs of the various population groups, particularly those who are most at risk, including displaced persons, refugees, women, children, older persons and persons with disabilities.
11. Supporting the work of parliamentary committees specialized in population and development issues, including the committees for women, children and social affairs, and activating their oversight role on government policies.
12. Strengthening the role of parliaments in developing disaster risk reduction policies, addressing emerging challenges, and giving due attention to the needs of different population groups during crises.
13. Supporting existing efforts to build the Arab parliaments' capacities in introducing and developing population legislations and integrating population issues into national policymaking processes. This can be achieved through national and regional training workshops that contribute to raising awareness, exchanging experiences and highlighting good practices in Arab parliaments.
14. Developing the capacities of parliamentary staff and research departments within parliaments to support the work of the parliaments on population and development issues.
15. Identifying the gaps in population and development data and improving data collection and analysis in quantitative and qualitative studies, while enhancing their availability to parliamentarians in order to support their role in developing evidence-based laws and policies.
16. Mobilizing joint action and continuously following up on the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action and the 2013 Cairo Declaration.
17. Establishing a joint mechanism in the Arab region to follow up on the achievement of population and development goals.
18. Rethinking the social contract in the Arab region, and ways to consolidate the citizenship values, adopt the rights and duties approach, and reconsider the development concepts taking into consideration the realities, priorities and specificities of Arab societies.



Annex II

Population and development in the Arab region: challenges and prospects ten years after the 2013 Cairo Declaration

Stakeholders dialogue on the sixth regional review of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development Online, 1 June 2023

Key messages and recommendations from the stakeholders dialogue

In preparation for the sixth review of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) ten years after the 2013 Cairo Declaration, the Economic and Social Commission of Western Asia (ESCWA), the United Nations Population Fund's Arab States Regional Office (UNFPA ASRO) and the League of Arab States, in partnership with the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF-Arab region), organized a stakeholders dialogue that engaged representatives of civil society organizations, including youth and women's organizations, the private sector, and research and academic institutions concerned with population, human rights and development issues in the Arab region.

The dialogue aimed at exchanging experiences among stakeholders on the regional review process, enhancing their participation in the implementation of the 2013 Cairo Declaration, assessing progress in its implementation, identifying gaps and proposing solutions to address challenges according to their area of work, in response to the recommendations of the Programme of Action which urges a participatory approach in the preparation of the review. Participants agreed on the following policy recommendations and messages, which will be submitted to the regional review conference to be held in September 2023 in Beirut:

1. Integrate strategies for disaster risk prevention and reduction in development planning to prevent regression in achieving population and development goals and build resilient and sustainable societies.
2. Further recognize the role of civil society institutions in the provision of health and humanitarian services, in situations of conflict and natural disasters.
3. Strengthen the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in reaching populations on the ground and providing data on their realities and conditions, to assist Governments in developing evidence-based policies.
4. Empower NGOs and support them technically and financially to enhance their contribution to the advancement of the ICPD Programme of Action in all settings, and facilitate their access to remote and conflict-affected areas to address the needs and rights of the population, especially vulnerable groups.
5. Develop and strengthen multilateral partnerships between civil society organizations, Governments and different stakeholders to exchange experiences and successful practices and consolidate efforts to advance the ICPD Programme of Action.
6. Reaffirm the role of civil society in mobilizing and advocating for legal amendments and for the adoption of policies that take into account the human rights and needs of different population groups, in line with the recommendations of the ICPD Programme of Action and the 2013 Cairo Declaration and by adopting a rights-based approach.
7. Mainstream issues of older persons, youth, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups into the development policymaking process to fulfill their rights and ensure the full and effective participation of all population groups in the formulation of the rights-based and evidence-based policies.

8. Adopt a life-cycle approach in developing comprehensive health programmes and services, including for sexual and reproductive health, that take into account all age groups without discrimination and reflect the interlinkage of health outcomes at different age levels.
9. Break the negative stereotype associated with older persons as dependents and in need of care, promote and protect their human rights, and recognize their role as active partners in the development process, who should be integrated into society, to benefit from their competencies and skills through mutual intergenerational dialogue and support.
10. Integrate the issues related to harmful practices such as female genital mutilation, child, early and forced marriage and gender-based violence, in the national dialogues on population and health and ensure the involvement of parliamentarians in these dialogues.
11. Develop, implement and finance national plans for the prevention of and protection against gender-based violence, including sexual violence and harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation, in all settings, including in emergencies and in the context of disasters and conflicts.
12. Adopt or amend legislations to abolish female genital mutilation and child, early and forced marriage.
13. Ensure age-responsive access to sexual and reproductive health services for women and girls, including comprehensive sexual education, and facilitate their access to primary health care services, especially in relation to early detection of diseases.
14. Raise awareness, fight misconceptions and remove barriers to addressing socially or culturally sensitive sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights topics, especially among youth and persons with disabilities, and provide access to these services.
15. Enhance the capacities of concerned ministries in engaging with youth and adolescents, and in providing information on sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.
16. Integrate mental health services and psycho-social support into public health programmes for all population groups, and promote sexual and reproductive health programmes targeting women, girls and youth.
17. Involve civil society organizations, especially those concerned with youth, in the various stages of the development and implementation of policies and programmes related to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, and not only in the awareness-raising stage.
18. Strengthen data systems in the region, develop and enhance data collection methodologies and make them available in quantitative and qualitative studies, especially in relation to data on discrimination, violence, abuse, and harmful practices, with the aim of providing evidence to identify population priorities in a way that reflects reality and ensuring that no one is left behind.
19. Enhance communication between data generators and users to identify, provide and access the required data, and build the capabilities of users on how to use and benefit from such data.
20. Benefit from the lessons learned and innovations in the work methodologies that were developed during the COVID-19 pandemic and avail of the use of contemporary technology in service delivery, data collection and sharing of information, experiences, and knowledge, such as developing mobile applications on where to find support and information, build networks for gender-based violence survivors and set up emergency hotlines for victims.

Annex III

Youth Declaration Sixth Regional Review of the International Conference on Population and Development in the Arab Region

Ten years after the 2013 Cairo Declaration

Regional Consultation for Adolescents and Youth⁵
Tunis, 22–23 June 2023

Foreword

We, young people from the Arab region, gathered at the Regional Consultation for Adolescents and Youth on the Sixth Regional Review of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in the Arab Region to mobilize our efforts and join our voices in support of the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action (PoA) as well as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda).⁶

Affirming that ICPD constituted a qualitative leap in the approach to the interrelation between population and development issues within a comprehensive and integrated framework that enshrines the reproductive rights of the individual as a fundamental human right, and that ICPD underlined women and girls' empowerment as a prerequisite for achieving sustainable development, and called on Governments to invest in young people, eradicate poverty and protect vulnerable groups.

We affirm that several achievements have been made in this regard, notably the expansion of the provision of family planning services, the integration of sexual and reproductive health services by some countries into the primary health care system, the decrease in mortality rates, especially among infants and children, and in maternal mortality, as a result of improved quality of services related to maternal health, family planning, prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases, as well as the provision of youth-friendly health services in the field of sexual and reproductive health, the inclusion of sex education in school programmes, and the implementation of regional programmes and projects that aim to promote youth empowerment in the Arab region and their access to their rights, such as the establishment of the Regional Centre of Excellence for Youth and the launch of the Arab Youth Charter.

However, the Arab region continues to face several challenges. These include high youth unemployment; low quality education; weak economic and political participation of women and young people; persistence of gender inequality, gender discrimination, harmful social norms and barriers that prevent women and girls from achieving their full potential, limiting their autonomy and decision-making, as well as increasing their risk of violence, forced marriage and other harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and child marriage, and the prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence; lack of opportunities for young people to make decisions that affect their lives; legal barriers and gaps in the field of protecting human rights, dignity and equality, in addition to the

⁵ The Regional Consultation for Adolescents and Youth was organized in collaboration between the United Nations Population Fund-Regional Office for Arab States and the League of Arab States, in partnership with the International Planned Parenthood Federation- Arab World Region, the Arab Institute for Human Rights and the Youth Peer Network.

⁶ All groups of young people, without discrimination of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, ethnic origin, age, language, religion, political and other opinion, national or social origin, disability, property, place of birth or other status.

lack of data on the situation of different youth groups and the negative repercussions of climate change and conflict on youth development and empowerment, and other emerging challenges.

The current review is particularly important amid the prevailing political instability and successive crises in the Arab region, the latest of which was the COVID-19 pandemic and its widespread negative repercussions on the lives and well-being of the population.

We are all concerned with population issues, sustainable development, human rights, and with contributing to improving people's lives. We contribute our expertise, potential, experience and innovation to accelerate the implementation of the ICPD PoA. Therefore, we cite this declaration, which contains our commitments and then our recommendations.

Commitments

We, young men and women from the Arab region, undertake to dedicate our capabilities, efforts, and determination to:

1. Strive to accelerate the implementation of the ICPD PoA and the 2030 Agenda.
2. Promote volunteerism and entrepreneurship in development efforts at the national and local levels, and promote peace, social cohesion, and protection against gender-based violence.
3. Combat gender-based violence, including by engaging women and men influencers, strengthening our role through peer education networks and social media to achieve gender equality, and develop and implement policies, programmes and laws to end gender-based violence.
4. Advocate for active participation in political and civic life by engaging in local, regional and international dynamics, in order to amplify the voices of young people and adolescents, especially in the most vulnerable communities.
5. Engage in volunteering activities to promote sexual and reproductive health services, with a focus on the most vulnerable groups.
6. Mobilize support and advocate for the access of young people to accurate and up-to-date information about their sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, including gender equality.
7. Call on decision makers to develop and enact policies and programmes that are friendly to young people, including people with disabilities.
8. Promote intergenerational dialogue, solidarity, and collaboration.
9. Share experiences and best practices while harnessing all possibilities, including digital ones, to find innovative solutions to support access to sexual and reproductive health services that respond to the needs of young people and adolescents.
10. Create, develop and facilitate access to reliable media content made for young persons on sexual and reproductive health concepts and questions, while respecting cultural and national specificities.

Recommendations

We, young people from the Arab region, call on member States, Governments, civil society, international organizations, the United Nations, and other decision makers, to strive to implement the following recommendations:

1. Develop targeted policies and programmes that are friendly to young people, including persons with disabilities and those from vulnerable groups, as well as policies and programmes promoting positive discrimination, and support the political participation of women, young men and women, and their access to decision-making positions.

2. Develop the statistical and data collection system and conduct periodic and up-to-date studies on gender-based violence, its effects and types, while ensuring the privacy and protection of the collected information.
3. Improve the services provided for men and women survivors of violence, and ensure protection and the right to access the minimum package of services for victims of sexual violence.
4. Enhance the oversight and follow-up of programmes aimed at protecting against gender-based violence, and ensure the autonomy of the oversight and accountability system.
5. Advocate for comprehensive survivor care laws that provide for prevention, protection, and integrated and adapted services for women with disabilities and working women survivors of violence, including migrants and refugees.
6. Strengthen coordination between relevant Governments, decision makers and civil society at the national and regional levels to enact laws that deter gender-based violence and support survivors' access to services and protection and restore their dignity.
7. Ensure international follow-up on and accountability over the pledges and commitments made by States at the national, regional, continental and international levels.
8. Require that the provision of international financial support and allocation of resources be conditioned on the extent to which Governments undertake to implement their commitments and pledges.
9. Promote awareness-raising campaigns about the rights of different groups, including persons with disabilities, as well as their environment and methods of communication, and respect these rights.
10. Support family and parental education programmes on non-discrimination, equality and healthy relationships.
11. Enhance censorship over traditional and digital media that promote gender-based violence and negative female stereotypes.
12. Adopt a media charter that identifies the responsibility and duty of the media to renounce gender-based violence and promote a culture of gender equality.
13. Support the participation and targeting of men and boys in awareness-raising and education programmes on harmful practices and gender-based violence.
14. Work with community leaders, especially religious leaders, to clarify misconceptions and reject violence against women.
15. Integrate comprehensive sex education into school curricula and programmes, starting at the early school stages.
16. Develop policies, laws and procedures that ensure the safe access of everyone, especially the most vulnerable, to sexual and reproductive health services, including people in marginalized and hard-to-reach areas, as well as prisoners, girls, persons with disabilities, displaced and refugee populations, stateless people, people with mental health conditions and the elderly.
17. Ensure safe and dignified access to family planning for all and the access of girls and women to menstrual hygiene.
18. Integrate mental health and psychosocial support services with sexual and reproductive health services.
19. Take measures to ensure the meaningful and effective participation of adolescents and young people in national bodies working in the field of youth health.
20. Strengthen coordination, networking and organization between government agencies, civil society institutions, the private sector and the United Nations, and establish new partnerships to create a map of sexual and reproductive health services for Arab countries, to prevent dispersion of effort and duplication of services, and to achieve complementarity.
21. Work on the rehabilitation and training of sexual and reproductive health workers to ensure the dignity and rights of girls, women, persons with disabilities and the most vulnerable groups and provide them with appropriate service.
22. Provide financial and technical support to civil society organizations working in the field of sexual and reproductive health to ensure and enhance the continuity of their interventions.
23. Promote the role of young people in devising creative ways to access reliable information about sexual and reproductive health using electronic platforms, artificial intelligence, interactive

theater, therapy through drama and other methods, taking into account local laws governing the use of such tools.

24. Promote intergenerational dialogue on reproductive rights and sexual and reproductive health by creating safe real and virtual platforms and spaces.
25. Raise awareness about legal rights related to sexual and reproductive health, including for persons with disabilities, by harnessing all available capabilities and involving all actors.
26. Provide and disseminate up-to-date official data and statistics on youth in sexual and reproductive health areas, involving academic actors from universities and research centres, and give young researchers the opportunity to participate in such initiatives, while ensuring the privacy and protection of the information collected.
27. Develop youth programmes and schemes based on field research and studies.
28. Establish accountability procedures to ensure that women are not subjected to violence while receiving sexual and reproductive health services, especially during childbirth.
29. Create a unified action strategy for the various government agencies, while ensuring the adoption of integrated public policies to promote the role of young people and ensure their sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.
30. Develop and enact policies and procedures to ensure women's access to safe abortion services, wherever legal, and provide post-abortion care services to ensure maternal health and well-being.
31. Develop and enact practical policies and procedures to reduce the prevalence of female genital mutilation in Arab countries.
32. Develop policies that ensure that young people and adolescents are represented as partners in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of public policies that concern them.
33. Increase the efficiency of employees in state institutions and departments to better respond to the evolving needs of youth.
34. Ensure the existence/implementation of advocacy projects, initiatives and campaigns under the supervision of state ministries, especially ministries of women, youth and education, with the involvement of local, national, Arab and international associations and organizations to reduce and pass legislation on child marriage, female genital mutilation and other harmful practices, including by raising the legal age for marriage.
35. Enact/implement a law on compulsory free education, especially in remote areas.
36. Raise awareness regarding girls' physical and sexual health, and the awareness of boys, by creating joint programmes involving young men and women as beneficiary groups wherever possible and raise the awareness of parents as well.
37. Establish funds and provide microloans to support youth projects, entrepreneurship and youth employment.
38. Change female stereotypes and negative images, and develop programmes to protect and empower girls, including those with disabilities.
39. Establish advisory committees for girls and by girls, as a means to increase their involvement in the design of interventions and decision-making processes, by establishing girls' parliaments and setting a specific quota for girls as young parliamentarians.
40. Include the terms "girls" and "women" in national policies, which already exist, and which are still in the process of developing, such as national youth strategies.