Contribution by the 51st session of the Commission on Population and Development to the 2018 high-level political forum on sustainable development

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The Commission on Population and Development (CPD) held its 51st session on 7 April 2017, immediately following the closure of the 50th session, and from 9 to 13 April 2018. Its special theme was "Sustainable cities, human mobility and international migration".

This note highlights contributions by the Commission in its recent session to the high-level political forum on sustainable development, meeting in New York from 9 to 18 July 2018 under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, with a theme of "Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies". This note contains key messages drawn from three reports of the Secretary-General prepared for the annual session, as well as from statements by Member States and presentations by invited speakers during the plenary meetings.

(a) Assessment regarding the principle of "ensuring that no one is left behind"

The Economic and Social Council reaffirmed in 2016 that the Commission's primary mandate is to monitor, review and assess the implementation of the Programme of Action of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). The Council also affirmed that the Commission would contribute to the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development within its existing mandate (E/RES/2016/25).

During the 51st session of the Commission on Population and Development, delegations emphasized that the full implementation of the Programme of Action is critical for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, and they stressed the importance of taking population trends, including those related to urbanization, human mobility and international migration,

into account as part of development planning. Member States recognized the synergy of migration and development, including the value of remittances to countries of origin. They emphasized the importance of facilitating migration that is safe, orderly and regular, and they reaffirmed their commitment to upholding the human rights of migrants.

The Commission had before it three substantive reports of the Secretary General: on the special theme of the session, on the monitoring of population programmes and on world demographic trends. The reports emphasized that fertility levels are declining and life expectancy at birth is increasing in almost all countries. Two major consequences of these trends, which together comprise the demographic transition, are the rapid growth of the human population – rising from less than one billion to a future level of around 11 billion over a period of roughly 350 years – and the substantial upward shift in the population distribution by age. Although all countries are experiencing a similar set of changes, there is currently a wide range of demographic situations and population trajectories across countries and geographic regions. In Africa, a relatively young population contributes to the rapid growth of the population. At the other extreme, the population of Europe is ageing rapidly and will begin to decline in size within a few years.

Another major global trend is urbanization, referring to the growth of cities and urban areas and to the increasing share of the total population that resides in urban areas. Population growth contributes to rapid urbanization and to an increase in the size and number of urban settlements. Urbanization is driven also by the movement of people from rural to urban areas, reflecting the economic shift from agriculture to industrial production.

In recent decades, international migration has reached unprecedented levels, with most movements taking place between countries of the same geographic region. Cities are on the frontlines of receiving, hosting and integrating migrants into countries of destination.

As in previous years, the Commission heard two keynote presentations on the special theme of the session. In an address on "Urbanization and migration - two global megatrends: Diversity, opportunities, and challenges", the speaker from Senegal focused on the nexus of urbanization and migration. He emphasized the importance of urban areas for the future of the planet, noting that most megacities today are found in developing countries and asserting that cities can be drivers of sustainable development. He suggested that migration could play an important role in the context of ageing urban populations and noted that international migration was mostly intraregional. He discussed the challenges of, and barriers against, migrant integration into host societies and explained that cities play a critical role in welcoming and hosting migrants. Lastly, he expressed concern about the current migration crisis, including the problems of human trafficking and migrant fatalities in transit.

For the second keynote address on "Urban settlements as global immigrant gateways", the speaker from the United States observed that some cities serve as "gateways": critical entry points that draw international migrants from a wide range of origin countries. These gateway

cities facilitate cultural exchange and are nodes for the collection, circulation and dispersion of goods, capital and people. The 22 largest gateway cities worldwide each have more than one million foreign-born residents. These highly diverse communities offer many opportunities to residents but also tend to be characterized by exclusion, vulnerability and segregation. The speaker also mentioned the increasing number of rotating migrant labourers, who are often allowed entry only temporarily or without authorization, and who often live and work in precarious and unstable conditions and are at heightened risk of being left behind.

During an expert panel and interactive discussion on "Cities at the forefront of receiving migrants: Experiences and lessons learned", panellists emphasized the interconnectedness and interdependence between international migration and urban growth, calling for greater coherence in policymaking at the national, local and city levels. The speakers also provided examples of different types of migration, and of the principal migration corridors and cities, in order to understand better the impact of migration on cities and how cities had sought to meet the attendant challenges. The panellists highlighted the contributions of international migrants to the cities that host them, emphasizing that positive impacts are contingent on having appropriate policies. It was noted that in many cities of the global South, unplanned urban growth often segregates migrants, restricting their access to services and infrastructure.

During the 51st session, many speakers expressed the view that the availability of timely and reliable demographic data, disaggregated according to key characteristics of individuals, is essential for planning and implementing policies and programmes and for identifying groups that are at risk of being left behind. The capacity to collect, disseminate and analyse relevant data and statistics at the global, regional, national and subnational levels can facilitate evidence-based policymaking and support the monitoring of progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals. Improvements in civil registration and health information systems, the use of geo-referencing as a standard practice of data collection, and broad participation in the 2020 round of population censuses were seen as essential elements for tracking the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. These traditional data sources require strengthening, while the world also learns to exploit alternative sources of information, including "big data", which can provide important information to supplement traditional data sources but cannot replace them as principle sources of information about demographic behaviours and global population trends.

Overall, a review of the Commission's work on sustainable cities, human mobility and international migration reveals the important contribution of well- managed urbanization and international migration to achieving Goals 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 10, and 11, and as well as target 17.18.

(b) Identification of gaps, areas requiring urgent attention, risks and challenges

In their statements, most Member States reaffirmed their commitment to the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action and gave examples of national priorities and best practices. Some expressed the view that increased national efforts and additional support from donors

would be necessary to achieve the goals set in the ICPD Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Member States acknowledged the significance of migration as a global megatrend, as well as the challenges faced by countries of origin, transit and destination. They emphasized that the human rights of migrants and refugees must be protected and fulfilled, and that human trafficking, exploitation and modern forms of slavery must be combatted and eliminated. The challenges of international migration, such as providing migrants with access to basic social services and adequate housing, were balanced by a common perception that well-managed migration contributes to development and economic growth.

Speakers noted, however, that Member States would need to create the right conditions, so that migrants and their families can contribute to the development of their host communities as well as their countries of origin: for example, by facilitating the flow of migrant remittances, which are a key contributor to the economic development of origin countries. Several Member States agreed on the need to address the negative drivers of migration, such as poverty, lack of opportunity, epidemic disease, discrimination, violence, insecurity and climate change.

Member States took note of the rapid urbanization occurring in some countries, and underlined the need to revitalize rural areas and regions with shrinking and ageing populations. There was recognition that some large cities serve as gateways for international migrants when arriving in countries of destination, and that local governments are challenged by the task of integrating migrants into the host society.

Member States reported from their experience that investment in education and health care helped countries to benefit from a demographic dividend made possible by an elevated share of the population in the working age range. For many Member States, large numbers of youth pose an imminent challenge to providing access to quality education and decent jobs for all, especially among urban populations that are both young and mobile. Member States with fast-growing cities have identified increasing inequality and exclusion as issues to be addressed by creating environments that are safe and accessible to all, by providing affordable access to basic services and infrastructure such as water, sanitation, housing and jobs, and by improving the quality of live for all. Expanding and modernizing public services, including education and health care, are priorities for many Member States, especially in the context of informal settlements or urban slums.

Many Member States reiterated the need and priority for gender equality. They gave priority as well to protecting and supporting various marginalized and vulnerable groups, including poor people, slum dwellers, youth and older persons, as well as refugees and other migrants.

(c) Lessons learned on transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies

Governments should recognize that evidence-based decision-making at both the national and local levels is a foundation of good governance and of the overall efficient management of

social and economic affairs. Moreover, Governments should acknowledge that relevant, accurate and timely population data disaggregated by age, sex, geographical location and migratory status are needed for planning and decision-making, noting that such data can help Governments to anticipate needs, determine the impact of public policies and confirm the pace of progress.

Governments should also seek to improve information on the demographic components of urban growth, including growth due to internal or international migration, and to promote a better understanding of migratory patterns to and from cities and of linkages between urban areas and places of origin. This can be done by supporting the role and enhanced capacity of national, subnational and local governments in data collection, mapping, analysis and dissemination, in accordance with international standards.

(d) Emerging issues likely to affect building sustainable and resilient societies

The development of standardized definitions and categories for the delimitation of cities and urban agglomerations is needed to facilitate the effective review and evaluation of progress in achieving the Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda on sustainable cities and urbanization. Where necessary, standardized concepts and definitions should be developed on topics such as internal and international migration, short-term mobility, and circular and return migration. Concerted efforts are required to accelerate the development of methodologies to measure migration-related indicators of sustainable development and to generate data on key development targets disaggregated by migratory status.

Remote-sensing and satellite imagery can improve understanding of the "urban footprint", including changes over time, while "big data" such as cell phone records can be used for documenting and analysing local patterns of migration and mobility. In developing policies and guidelines for the use of new data sources, Governments should protect individual privacy and the confidentiality of information, while developing regulatory mechanisms to facilitate public access to relevant data collected by the private sector.

(e) Areas where political guidance by the high-level political forum is required

Governments, international organizations and civil society should work in partnership to promote capacity-building and technical cooperation, including South-South cooperation, in order to improve the collection, dissemination and analysis of data on sustainable cities, human mobility and international migration at the national, regional and local levels.

Cooperation within and across countries and regions is crucial to remedy existing data gaps in the area of migration. National institutions and stakeholders, including statistical offices and ministries in charge of migration issues, should coordinate data collection efforts and share available information. International and regional organizations should coordinate their efforts in developing programmes and methodologies and providing technical assistance to improve the collection and use of data in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

(f) Policy recommendations to accelerate progress toward sustainable and resilient societies

Urban planning is critical for the development of a sustainable infrastructure capable of providing access to essential services for all residents, especially the urban poor. Planning for service delivery to residents of both urban and rural areas should consider different scenarios for the future growth of cities and the surrounding rural communities, including patterns of internal migration and mobility and the changing spatial distribution of the population.

The needs of women, including for equal access to education, health care, decent work, property rights and political participation, should be considered in policy formulation and implementation. Priority should be given to improving access to reproductive health-care services, including family planning, for all women, including female migrants. National and local governments should address the needs of rapidly growing numbers of older persons in both urban and rural areas, including policies to promote healthy ageing and improve access to infrastructure and services, giving special attention to the needs of older persons and children left behind in rural areas.

Local governments, working in partnership with national authorities and civil society, should promote the integration of migrants and their families into the host society while ensuring the protection and fulfilment of their human rights. Local authorities should encourage and support the active involvement of civil society organizations, including those representing migrant groups, in efforts to improve housing, infrastructure and social services for the poor and to reduce the vulnerability of low-income groups to environmental hazards.

Migration policies should seek to minimize the potential negative impacts of migration on countries of origin, including loss of human capital and separation of families, and to maximize its potential benefits by reducing the transfer costs of remittances, promoting the recognition of skills and credentials, ensuring the portability of earned benefits and supporting the engagement of diaspora groups and communities in their countries of origin.

Census data on the populations of urban and rural areas and on internal and international migration should be collected, compiled and disseminated in a timely fashion. The use of new technologies should be encouraged to reduce the time required for data gathering and processing. Data should be collected on internal and international migrants and migration through household survey programmes, such as the Demographic and Health Surveys and the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys. Governments should also encourage and facilitate the use of existing data from administrative records to promote a better understanding of these topics.