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Priority issues in achieving social development in the Arab region

The population dimension in achieving sustainable development

Summary

Population dynamics, namely population growth, age structures, urbanization and migration, have an impact on the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. Building on this perspective, this document advocates the importance of focusing on vulnerable sociodemographic groups, particularly youth, international migrants, older persons and persons with disabilities, to bridge the existing gaps between them and the mainstream population.

The document reviews the current situation of these groups in the Arab region. It identifies population issues and priorities in the sustainable development goals proposed by the Open Working Group of the United Nations General Assembly, and compares that global framework to the Cairo Declaration, adopted in June 2013 by Arab States in the Regional Conference on Population and Development. The document concludes with a set of recommendations on the importance of implementing the Declaration and of ensuring that the final version of the global development framework includes a strong population focus as a key enabler for achieving sustainable development.

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Introduction

1.   Population dynamics are at the heart of sustainable development. At the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo, Governments agreed on the following principle: "Sustainable development ...requires that the interrelationships between population, resources, the environment and development should be fully recognized, properly managed and brought into harmonious, dynamic balance."[1] This principle reflects the fact that population dynamics, namely population growth, age structures, urbanization and migration, have an impact on the social, economic and environmental pillars of sustainable development.

2.   This document highlights the close link between population and sustainable development. It identifies population issues and priorities in the proposed sustainable development goals (SDGs) and pinpoints the specific references made to four sociodemographic groups, namely youth, international migrants, older persons and persons with disabilities. The vulnerable, as a broader category that could encompass all sociodemographic groups at high risk of discrimination, are also included. The identification of specific references to the group of women goes beyond the scope of this document and will not be covered in the analysis.

3.   The document also presents the characteristics of the above-mentioned four sociodemographic groups and the development challenges that they face in the Arab region. It highlights the convergence between the proposed SDGs and commitments of Arab States on population issues as enshrined in the 2013 Cairo Declaration on "Development Challenges and Population Dynamics in a Changing Arab World".[2] It finally proposes recommendations for member States of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) on the preparations for the post-2015 United Nations development agenda on the one hand, with a view to ensuring that the final version of SDGs includes a strong population focus as a key enabler for the achievement of sustainable development; and on advancing the well-being of youth, international migrants, older persons and persons with disabilities in the Arab region on the other hand, with a view to bridging the existing gaps between them and the mainstream population.

I. POPULATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

4.   Population dynamics provide opportunities and pose challenges that directly and indirectly impact social, economic and environmental development. They have both positive and negative effects on the levels of demand for services, consumption, production and availability of natural resources, potentially representing opportunities for sustained economic growth and poverty reduction, resilience and the achievement of gender equality. Understanding population dynamics enables a greater awareness of who is vulnerable and whose development needs are not being met through existing programmes. Failure to account for these dynamics in development planning and public service delivery could therefore lead to the needs of people not being adequately met.

5.   The global review of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) was aimed at assessing the progress made in the implementation of the 1994 ICPD Programme of Action to identify achievements, remaining gaps and emerging challenges, and make recommendations on the way forward beyond 2014. It coincided with global consultations on the post-2015 development agenda and was essentially based on regional reviews and consultations. Findings from the reviews undertaken by the five United Nations regional commissions and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), pursuant to General Assembly resolution 65/234 of 5 April 2011 entitled "Follow-up to the International Conference on Population and Development beyond 2014", subsequently informed the report of the Secretary-General on the "Framework of actions for the follow-up to the Programme of Action of the International Conference on

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[1] Principle 6 of the Programme of Action adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 5-13 September 1994, A/CONF.171/13.

[2] Outcome document of the Regional Conference on Population and Development in the Arab States (ICPD beyond 2014), Cairo, 24-26 June 2013. Available from http://arabstates.unfpa.org/webdav/site/as/shared/docs/2013_Cairo_Declaration_English.pdf.

Population and Development beyond 2014",[3] which was presented to the forty-seventh session of the Commission on Population and Development (New York, 7-11 April 2014). The report highlighted the five key thematic areas of dignity and human rights; health; place and mobility; governance and accountability; and sustainability, and set a framework for the complete achievement of the 1994 ICPD Programme of Action and for tackling population priorities beyond 2014.

6.   Results of the review and consultations undertaken in the Arab region highlighted that the progress made in the implementation of the Programme of Action has been "remarkable, yet unbalanced".[4] For instance, while some progress seems to have been achieved in the areas of reproductive health and rights, education and the empowerment of women, other areas such as internal migration and urbanization, international migration and issues of concern to older persons did not witness major improvements in most Arab countries. Two key hindering factors identified by the review were: (a) lack of funds devoted to the development of related policies and programmes and to the creation of adequate institutions to address population and development issues and priorities; and (b) fragmented approach in dealing with the population and development issues identified in the Programme of Action. The first factor, i.e. lack of funds, can be linked to population dynamics not being adequately integrated in the Millennium Development Goals, which formed the main framework through which development funds were channelled over the past 15 years.

7.   The Regional Conference on Population and Development in the Arab States, held in Cairo from 24 to 26 June 2013, provided a golden opportunity for these States to renew their political commitment to the ICPD Programme of Action. Participants adopted the Cairo Declaration as a road map for advancing the population and development regional agenda beyond 2014. The Declaration tackled the key thematic areas listed in the above-mentioned report of the Secretary-General, referring to them as "dignity and equality"; "health"; "place and environment sustainability"; and "governance".

8.   In subsequent global events, Governments reemphasized the importance of population to sustainable development. Population dynamics have indeed been considered as part of the global thematic consultations on the post-2015 development agenda, particularly in the work of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (OWG), which was established on 22 January 2013 to prepare a proposal on SDGs.

II. POPULATION DYNAMICS IN THE ARAB REGION

9.   The Arab population has more than doubled over the past 30 years, increasing from 167.2 million in 1980 to 363.3 million in 2012, with 51.7 per cent of males and 48.3 per cent of females. It is projected to reach 604 million by 2050, which would be equivalent to an increase by two thirds from 2012 levels. The sex composition is expected to remain more or less the same, with 51.2 per cent of males and 48.8 per cent of females. A regional annual average growth rate of 2.4 per cent, compared to a global average growth rate of 1.5 per cent, drove this increase in the size of the population over the past three decades. Declining fertility levels will cause a drop in the regional annual average growth rate to 1.7 per cent for the period 2012-2025, a figure still above the global average of 1.0 per cent for the same period.[5] Nevertheless, because of population momentum, large increments will continue to be added to the Arab population for some time ahead. It is the large portion of young people in their reproductive years that will drive this growth.

10.   The Arab region is relatively young in terms of age composition. Children (0-14) form about one third of its population and youth (15-24) about one fifth. The absolute number of children and youth will continue to increase, respectively reaching 135.5 million in 2030 up from 116.0 million in 2010, and 85.3 million in 2030 up from 69.4 million in 2010. However, the proportions of children and youth will decline, from 33.3

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[3] A/69/62.

[4] ESCWA, League of Arab States, Economic Commission for Africa and UNFPA, *ICPD Beyond 2014 Arab States Report: Development Challenges and Population Dynamics in a Changing Arab World, Executive Summary* (Cairo, 2014).

[5] ESCWA, "The demographic profile of the Arab countries", E/ESCWA/SDD/2013/Technical Paper.14 (2013).

per cent in 2010 to 27.8 per cent in 2030 for the first group and from 19.9 per cent in 2010 to 17.5 per cent in 2030 for the second. This downward trend is expected to continue as the population momentum slows down.

11.   The age group with the most rapid growth rate is the working age population (25-64). It is projected to grow from 148.6 million in 2010, representing 42.7 per cent of the population, to 236.1 million in 2030, thereby forming 48.8 per cent of the population. As for the smallest age group in the Arab region, it is that of older persons (65 years and above), which amounted to 4.1 per cent of the total Arab population in 2010. Countries of the region that have maintained high fertility rates are ageing slowly; nevertheless, the pace of increase in the older persons' proportion of the Arab population is projected to pick up: their proportion will reach 7.3 per cent in 2035, up from 5.5 per cent in 2025. It will then increase to 9.8 per cent in 2045 and 11.7 per cent in 2050. In absolute terms, this would correspond to about 38.0 million (2035), 56.8 million (2045) and 70.4 million people (2050).[6]

12.   The urban population in the Arab region was estimated at 57.7 per cent in 2014, which exceeds the world average of 53.6 per cent for the same year. The average annual urban growth rate stood at about 3.1 per cent for the period 1980-2014; it is projected to decline to 2.1 per cent and 1.6 per cent in the periods 2014-2030 and 2030-2050, respectively. However, the urban population is projected to increase from 218.2 million in 2014 to 416.8 million in 2050, then forming more than two thirds of the region's population.[7]

13.   International migration is high in the Arab region. The leading form of migration is labour migration, followed by forced migration. The absolute number of international migrants in the region increased by about 15.4 million over the past 23 years, going up from 14.9 million in 1990 (6.5 per cent of total Arab population) to 30.3 million in 2013 (8.2 per cent of total Arab population). At the global level, the number of international migrants stood at 154.2 million in 1990 (2.9 per cent of the world population) and 231.5 million in 2013 (3.2 per cent of the world population). The Arab region thus hosted 9.6 per cent of the world's international migrants in 1990 and 13.1 per cent in 2013. It is worth noting that in 2013, 73.8 per cent of international migrants in the Arab region were hosted by countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council.[8]

14.   The population of forced migrants has increased over the past few years in the region, as a result of major population displacement due to instability and conflict. As per recent estimates from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, registered people who fled the Syrian Arab Republic since the beginning of the conflict amount to 3.8 million. Out of this total, 1.2 million have fled to Lebanon and 622,600 to Jordan, adding pressure on the resources and infrastructure of host communities and challenging their capacity to properly address the needs and rights of refugees.[9]

15.   The age structure of a population is influenced by the interplay of demographic processes, namely birth, death and migration. At present, the Arab population is young. Anticipated declines in the child dependency ratio caused by decreasing fertility rates will lead to reductions in the overall dependency ratio. Coupled with the previously mentioned considerable increase in the working-age population, this situation creates a demographic window of opportunity in several countries of the region, as it enhances the prospects for boosting savings and investments in economic and social development. Nevertheless, reaping the benefits of the demographic dividend is not automatic. States will have to create the right policy environment to promote good governance, economic growth and the development of human capital throughout the life course.

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[6] Ibid.

[7] ESCWA calculations, based on data from the United Nations World Urbanization Prospects database, the 2014 revision. Available from http://esa.un.org/unpd/wup/.

[8] ESCWA, "The demographic profile of the Arab countries".

[9] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Syria Regional Refugee Response – Interagency Information Sharing Portal. Available from http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php#_ga=1.27290108.1569209750.1391411725 (accessed 19 February 2015).

III. DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES

A. YOUTH

16.   Youth aged between 15 and 24 years face many challenges in the Arab region in the areas of education, employment, health and participation. Despite the progress achieved on most education-related indicators, problems such as illiteracy, dropouts from primary education, gender disparities in enrolment levels, the quality of education and its correlation to the demands of the labour market persist, albeit with considerable variations between countries of the region. The latter two issues are particularly important in the context of high youth unemployment rates. The youth unemployment rate in the Arab region is the highest in the world, standing at 23.2 per cent compared to a world average of 13.9 per cent, again with major differences between countries and with young women being at a greater disadvantage.[10] Moreover, health provisions to youth are sometimes inadequate and access to information on sexual and reproductive health and to health facilities can be poor. Most importantly, youth participation in decision-making processes is limited: 19 per cent of Arab youth participate in civil society organizations compared to 32 per cent of African youth.[11] Many countries in the region choose to deal with "youth issues by proxy, through committees on sport, culture or family affairs".[12]

17.   Tackling these challenges requires the development of youth policies, plans and programmes that are consistent with the realities of the region, and that help capture the full potential of youth while creating new opportunities for them. By providing a cross-sectoral focus on youth, SDGs offer a good framework for addressing these issues, and for potentially benefitting from the youth bulge and capturing the demographic dividend.

B. INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS

18.   International migration constitutes one of the main factors driving social and economic development in the Arab region. It varies in magnitude and form, with forced migration as the most dominant form of migration after labour migration. International migrants face a number of challenges in the region: they often do not have access to social protection systems; their engagement, through civil society organizations that deal with migrants' issues, in the development and implementation of policies and programmes that concern them is minimal; and they are generally prohibited from participating in trade unions and similar associations. Efforts exerted in Arab countries to protect and safeguard the rights of migrants should be enhanced. Migrant domestic workers are especially vulnerable as the majority are not covered by labour legislations. Introducing legislative reforms in conformity with international conventions and treaties is thus recommended to protect the rights of migrant workers.

19.   Forced migrants suffer from numerous challenges in the region, most prominent of which is the lack of access to shelter and social services. They have to compete with equally vulnerable local populations in host communities for scarce resources such as housing, food, shelter, water and livelihood opportunities, which exacerbates their vulnerability.

20.   The integration of migration issues in SDGs is likely to strengthen the current efforts exerted by Arab States to improve migration governance in line with global and regional norms and conventions. This will help them maximize the development benefits of international migration and reduce its negative impacts.

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[10] United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and International Labour Organization (ILO), *Rethinking Economic Growth: Towards Productive and Inclusive Arab Societies* (Beirut, 2012), p. 52.

[11] Mercy Corps, *Civic Engagement of Youth in the Middle East and North Africa: An Analysis of Key Drivers and Outcomes* (March 2012), p. 11. Available from http://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/mena_youth_civic_engagement_study_-_final.pdf.

[12] ESCWA and the United Nations Programme on Youth, "Regional overview: youth in the Arab region" (2010). Available from http://social.un.org/youthyear/docs/Regional%20Overview%20Youth%20in%20the%20Arab%20Region-Western%20Asia.pdf.

C. OLDER PERSONS

21.   Although ageing is not yet high on the political agenda of Arab Governments, this phenomenon is of great importance in the fast-ageing countries of the Arab region.[13]   An increasingly important demographic group, both in terms of size and needs, older persons are faced with a number of challenges in several Arab countries. These include the changing structure of the family, which still plays an important role in providing care to older persons; inadequate income security and social protection schemes coupled with high incidence of poverty, especially among older women; extended participation in the labour market, particularly in the informal sector; inequitable access to health care; lack of adequate specialization and training in geriatrics and gerontology; accessibility to public services and public spaces; and failure to account for the needs of older persons in emergencies.[14]

22.   Addressing these challenges is of prime importance, especially since ageing is happening at a faster pace in Arab countries than it did in more developed countries and at lower levels of socioeconomic development. This will risk outstripping existing social and welfare support mechanisms, which are already weak. It also limits the time available for States to put in place the necessary institutional mechanisms to adequately address the needs of their ageing populations. Plans should thus be developed in advance to ensure that older persons live in dignity.

D. PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

23.   The disability prevalence rate is relatively low in Arab countries, ranging from 0.4 per cent to 4.9 per cent.[15]   However, considering the predominance of risk factors and hazards in the region and the difficulties in data collection and analysis, one could infer that the figures do not reflect the actual size of the problem. In general, persons with disabilities in the region experience more limited access to employment opportunities and quality education than persons without disabilities, which jeopardizes their income security and puts them at a higher risk of poverty. In several Arab countries, the employment rate for persons with disabilities is only equivalent to half or one third that of the total population and the illiteracy rate is about four or five times higher. The problem is compounded for women with disabilities, who face additional barriers to their participation in social and economic life. Persons with disabilities also have limited access to quality health-care facilities and services. Inadequate health insurance and social protection schemes further contribute to their exclusion and marginalization.[16]   The proposed SDGs provide a cross-sectoral framework for addressing these multiple forms of exclusion, enabling the development of integrated policies to deal with issues of accessibility.

IV. POPULATION IN THE PROPOSED SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

24.   The Report of the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals proposes 17 goals, with 169 targets and means and implementation, to be realized by 2030.[17] They are intended to be global in nature, of universal relevance, adaptable at the national level, respectful of national realities and priorities, and addressing both persistent and emerging challenges. They take into account population and development issues and population dynamics, given their importance to the achievement of

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[13] Countries that are ageing fast based on the 'old age dependency ratio' and the 'oldest old dependency ratio' indicators are: Egypt, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, the Syrian Arab Republic and Tunisia (see ESCWA, "Demographic profile of the Arab countries: analysis of the ageing phenomenon, E/ESCWA/SDD/2011/Technical Paper.9 (2011)).

[14] For more information, see ESCWA, "Ageing in the Arab region: trends, implications and policy options", E/ESCWA/SDD/2013/Technical Paper.15 (2013).

[15] ESCWA and League of Arab States, "Disability in the Arab region: an overview", E/ESCWA/SDD/2014/Technical Paper.1 (2014).

[16] Ibid.

[17] United Nations, *Report of the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals*, A/68/970 (August 2014). The numbering of goals and targets in the present document reflects the numbering adopted in that Open Working Group Report.

sustainable development. As intergovernmental negotiations on SDGs progressed in 2014, focus on population issues and sociodemographic groups was largely maintained, and only in some instances diluted as a result of efforts to streamline issues (see the box below for an example of such streamlining). This persisting focus shows the complementarity of the population and development agenda and the sustainable development framework on the one hand, and the importance accorded to population issues by Governments on the other hand. SDGs could thus be considered as an entry point for handling population issues and priorities beyond 2015.

25.   A number of population issues and priorities are reflected in SDGs to date, cutting across four goals and various targets. The goals are the following: (a) goal 3 on health and well-being; (b) goal 4 on inclusive and equitable education; (c) goal 5 on gender equality and the empowerment of women; and (d) goal 8 on inclusive economic growth and full and productive employment and decent work. Areas covered by the various targets include reducing all dimensions of poverty; ending hunger and malnutrition; doubling agricultural productivity and earnings of small food production enterprises/businesses; enabling access to adequate equitable sanitation; promoting social, economic and political inclusion; facilitating regular and safe migration; reducing the transaction cost of remittances; ensuring access to decent affordable housing and upgrading slums; promoting inclusive sustainable urbanization and design and management of human settlements; reducing all forms of violence and ending abuse, exploitation and trafficking; providing legal identity for all; ensuring public access to information and protecting fundamental freedoms; increasing the availability of quality periodic disaggregated data; and developing measurements of progress on sustainable development.

Streamlining population issues in SDGs: the example of international migration and migrants

In general, it is clear that except for displaced persons and refugees,[*] who represent two significant groups for the Arab region, emphasis on migrants was not reduced as the work of OWG progressed. As was the case for other sociodemographic groups, issues pertaining to migrants were rather streamlined; targets addressing more or less similar issues were either integrated into one overarching target or merged together to avoid redundancy. Some targets were turned into means of implementation and vice versa. The gender aspect was underlined in some instances. In others, a reference to a specific sociodemographic group was replaced by a reference to "the vulnerable".

Overarching targets require a very high number of actions and steps to be achieved and will need to be monitored through many quantitative indicators. The call to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies (target 10.7) provides a good example of such overarching targets. An example of redundancy avoidance is the consolidation of the different statements on remittances as a financial resource. Another such example is the different mentions of the same statement on lowering the transaction costs of migrants' remittances, which were also merged into one means of implementation (10.c).

This example shows that it is crucial to work on preserving targets that specifically address sociodemographic groups, particularly those that address vulnerable groups, during intergovernmental negotiations, in order to avoid any reduction in those targets and preserve the right of all sociodemographic groups to development.

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[*] It is important to note that there was a clear reference to displaced persons and refugees in three instances in the initial OWG proposal, which was dropped from subsequent versions. However, broad reference was maintained in the introduction to the proposal (A/68/970, pp. 6-9), which cites the "importance of freedom, peace and security, respect for all human rights" (para. 7); the "importance of … international instruments relating to human rights and international law…" (also in para. 7); the fact that "countries in situations of conflict also need special attention" (para. 10); and the need "to remove obstacles to the full realization of the right of self-determination of people living under colonial and foreign occupation" (para. 15).

A. YOUTH

26. Direct reference is made to the sociodemographic group of youth in connection with three areas, namely employment, education and climate change-related planning.[18] Emphasis is mostly placed on the issue of youth employment, addressed in three targets and in one means of implementation. Targets call for increasing the number of youth who have relevant skills for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship (target 4.4); achieving full and productive employment and decent work for youth and equal pay for work of equal value (target 8.5); and substantially reducing the proportion of youth not in employment (target 8.6). They should be achieved through the development and operationalization of a global strategy for youth employment, and the implementation of the Global Jobs Pact of the International Labour Organization (means of implementation 8.b). Emphasis is also placed on the education of youth, addressed in two targets (4.6 and 8.6) calling for achieving literacy and numeracy for all youth and for reducing the proportion of youth not in education or training. Reference to youth is also made in means of implementation 13.b, which calls for promoting mechanisms to raise capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management in least developed countries, including focusing on youth.

27. Reference to the age dimension is made at the level of goal 3 on health, with four associated targets addressing issues of relevance to youth, namely 3.5 on strengthening prevention and treatment of substance abuse; 3.6 on halving death and injuries from road traffic accidents; 3.7 on ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services; and 3.8 on achieving universal health coverage. In addition, there is reference to age in target 1.2 on reducing the proportion of people who live in poverty; target 10.2 on promoting inclusion in social, economic and political life; and means of implementation 17.18 on building capacities to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely, reliable and disaggregated data.

B. INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND MIGRANTS

28. Direct reference is made to migrants and migration-related issues in targets 5.2 and 16.2 on eliminating trafficking of women and children; target 8.8 on protecting labour rights and promoting safe and secure working environments, especially for women migrants; target 10.2 on promoting inclusion on the social, economic and political levels irrespective of origin; target 10.7 on facilitating orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the reduction of the transaction costs of remittances (means of implementation10.c); and in means of implementation 3.c on the retention of the health workforce in developing countries and 17.18 on enhancing capacities to make available high-quality disaggregated data, including by migratory status.

C. OLDER PERSONS

29. The proposed targets on ending all forms of malnutrition (2.2); providing safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems (11.2); and ensuring universal access to inclusive public places (11.7) specifically mention older persons. Additionally, paragraph 27 of the present document lists goals and targets that specifically mention the age dimension.

D. PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

30. Direct reference is made to persons with disabilities in the areas of employment (target 8.5), inclusion (target 10.2), accessibility (targets 11.2 and 11.7) and data availability (target 17.18). Reference to persons with disabilities is also made in the area of education, with focus placed on eliminating gender disparities and guaranteeing equal access to all education levels and vocational training (target 4.5),

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[18] Areas indirectly addressing a group's interest are not pointed out in the present document. References to adolescent girls are also not included.

including through ensuring the availability of disability sensitive, secure and inclusive education facilities (means of implementation 4.a).

E. VULNERABLE GROUPS

31.   Distinguishing vulnerable groups from the mainstream population is important to help bridge existing gaps by increasing focus on supporting the most disadvantaged. Specific reference is made to "the vulnerable" in various targets under goal 1 on poverty, calling for the implementation of adequate social protection systems and measures (target 1.3); the provision of equal access to economic resources, basic services and new technologies (target 1.4); and building resilience and reducing exposure to climate-related extreme events and other shocks and disasters (target 1.5). The vulnerable are also specifically referred to in target 2.1 under goal 2 on hunger, which calls for ending hunger and ensuring continuous access to safe, nutritious and sufficient food. Other targets that specifically mention the vulnerable are the following: target 4.5 on eliminating gender disparities in education and ensuring equal access to all levels of education and vocational training; target 6.2 on achieving access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene and ending open defecation; target 8.8 on protecting labour rights and promoting safe and secure working environments; target 11.2 on providing access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems; target 11.5 on considerably reducing the human and economic losses from disasters; and means of implementation 13.b on encouraging mechanisms aimed at building capacities to effectively manage climate change.

V. THE 2013 CAIRO DECLARATION AND THE PROPOSED SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS: COMPARATIVE REVIEW

32.   The 2013 Cairo Declaration on "Development Challenges and Population Dynamics in a Changing Arab World", which is the agreed framework for advancing population issues in the Arab region beyond 2014, and the proposed SDGs are two converging agendas. They differ in nature, the first being regional and touching in a comprehensive manner on the needed plans, programmes and policies to advance the population and development agenda in Arab countries; the second global, with encompassing goals allowing for national and regional adaptation. They are, nevertheless, comparable in their approaches to population issues in all areas, as will be shown in the following review.

A. YOUTH

33.   Under the theme of dignity and human rights, the Cairo Declaration underlines several issues of importance to youth, including: (a) access to quality education and matching educational outputs with the needs of the labour market; (b) guaranteeing decent employment to youth; (c) preventing their isolation and developing their capacity to build healthy social relations; (d) creating a skilled workforce through education, vocational training, career and job counselling, and social protection, among other things; (e) actively involving young people in decision-making, ensuring their political participation; and (f) nurturing in them respect of the rights of others and the values of non-discrimination and gender equality. While the proposed SDGs do not go into the same level of detail, they cover the same key aspects of education, employment and inclusion as highlighted in paragraph 26 of the present document.

34.   On the theme of health, the Cairo Declaration includes recommendations on the following subjects: (a) promoting conscious sexual and reproductive health awareness through parental guidance; (b) enabling the access of young people to high-quality, affordable, youth-friendly health services; (c) enhancing the health of young people, including mental aspects, and addressing non-responsible behaviour regarding smoking, drinking, drugs and road safety; (d) making available the needed education that enables young people to protect themselves from unwanted pregnancies, HIV and other sexually transmitted infections; and (e) eliminating child and forced marriage and female genital mutilation. There is no specific mention of youth or of any of the other sociodemographic groups of interest to this comparative analysis under goal

3 of the OWG proposal, which is encompassing and calls for ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages.

35.   Under the theme of place and mobility, the Cairo Declaration includes a recommendation on the need to strengthen the response to all forms of violence associated with displacement targeting young people, and to ensure that gender-based violence response services are accessible to conflict-affected populations. It also underlines the role of young people as agents of change in environmental protection efforts. In the OWG proposal, the importance of peace and security, of provision of support to conflict-stricken countries and of respect for human rights are all included in the introduction (A/68/970, paras 1-18, pp. 6-9).

36.   The governance and accountability theme is largely elaborated in the Cairo Declaration, which calls for developing policies and programmes aimed at building young people's capacities through formal and informal education and vocational training; educating them in citizenship; generating decent employment opportunities; promoting youth entrepreneurship; and providing career counselling and social protection. The Declaration also calls for promoting youth participation through education, arts, literature and all forms of communication media and by the following actions: (a) involving young people as key partners in decision-making and in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes that address issues of concern to them; (b) putting in place the right governance processes; (c) ensuring that they have access to needed information; and (d) strengthening the capacities of youth-led organizations and networks to enable young people to fulfil their potential. The Cairo Declaration finally underlines the importance of gathering and disseminating data and research on youth issues.

37.   As for the proposed SDGs, as previously shown, they mainly focus on youth in the areas of employment and age-disaggregated data. They do make reference to most of the governance issues covered in the Cairo Declaration, namely implementing social protection systems (target 1.3); engaging civil society organization in the implementation of SDGs (proposal's introduction, para. 14); developing effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels (target 16.6); and ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels (target 16.7) and public access to information (target 16.10); but with no specific mention of youth per se.

38. The sustainability aspect is also covered in some of the recommendations pertaining to youth in the Cairo Declaration, which calls for (a) integrating the impact of sustainable development, environment and social responsibility in all trade negotiations, including social impact on young people; (b) enhancing the awareness and knowledge of young people on environmental issues; and (c) involving them in efforts geared towards the protection of the environment to influence their choices in terms of consumption, lifestyle and jobs. The proposed SDGs mention young people on that subject in means of implementation 13.b, as already shown in paragraph 26 of the present document.

B. INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND MIGRANTS

39.   Under the theme of dignity and human rights, the Cairo Declaration recognizes that migrants still face multiple and overlapping forms of disempowerment and discrimination, and thus focuses on the need to do the following: (a) commit to the protection of migrants and to fulfilling their rights, including their human and labour rights; (b) pay special attention to the conditions of refugees, displaced persons and forced migrants in Arab States; (c) grant political, civil, economic, social and cultural rights to expatriates to entice them to invest in their home country; (d) combat xenophobia, discrimination, smuggling and trafficking; and (e) ratify the main international conventions on the human and labour rights of migrants. Apart from the issue of refugees and displaced persons, which is not specifically mentioned in the proposed SDGs but is included in the synthesis report of the Secretary-General on the post-2015 development agenda,[19] main migrant-related issues addressed in the Cairo Declaration are included in the proposed SDGs, as shown in paragraph 28 of the present document.

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[19] Report A/69/700 entitled "The road to dignity by 2030: ending poverty, transforming all lives and protecting the planet".

40.   On the theme of health, there is no specific mention of migrants in both frameworks, but rather recommendations that apply to the overall population in most instances. Recommendations in the Cairo Declaration focus on sexual and reproductive health; meeting family planning needs; eliminating child and forced marriage; improving the quality of medical services; and promoting compliance with ethical and professional standards. Similarly, goal 3 of the proposed SDGs includes targets on the issue of health that apply to the population at large.

41. In the Cairo Declaration, the recommendations on international migration under the thematic area of place and mobility also address the governance aspect of migration. Both the Declaration and proposed SDGs make reference to the following issues: (a) retention of health workers; (b) reduction of the transaction costs of remittances; (c) importance of increasing the availability of disaggregated data; and (d) importance of enhancing international cooperation. The last aspect is treated at a macro level in the proposed SDGs, while the Cairo Declaration specifically calls for cooperation between countries to maximize the contribution of migration to development. The Declaration also details issues within the realm of international migration where policies and measures should be formulated and implemented; plans and programmes developed; and systems and registers established. Focus is placed on labour migration, including the transfer of entitlements; encouraging investment in home countries; reintegrating return migrants; maximizing migration benefits; and regulating migration and fighting irregular migration. The Declaration finally refers to the importance of mainstreaming migration and multi-stakeholder collaboration. In the proposed SDGs, all these aspects could be inferred from one encompassing target (10.7), which calls for facilitating "orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies".

C. OLDER PERSONS

42.   As in the case of other sociodemographic groups, the two frameworks more or less advocate similar messages on issues of concern to older persons; however, the formulation and extent to which the argumentation delves into details vary. Again, the Cairo Declaration provides a more detailed coverage of these issues, especially in the area of governance. On issues pertaining to dignity and human rights, the Cairo Declaration emphasizes the need to commit to the following: (a) empower older persons by providing enabling environments that support active ageing, while benefiting from their accumulated life experiences and knowledge; (b) combat poverty, thus enabling families to care for the elderly; (c) uphold older persons' right to financial security and social care; (d) eliminate abuse, discrimination and violence against older persons, especially women, to enable them to live in dignity and security; and (e) promote the role of the family in the provision of care. In comparison, the proposed SDGs make reference to the age dimension when tackling poverty reduction and inclusion issues, specifically mentioning older persons only in the context of nutrition, as indicated in paragraph 29 of the present document.

43.   On health issues, the Cairo Declaration explicitly calls for promoting health and well-being in old age by supporting self care and prevention through the dissemination of health education materials, and by reforming health systems to focus on early screening and the prevention of disease, with a view to advancing and supporting active ageing. It also calls for including ageing diseases into health benefit plans and geriatrics as a specialty in university curricula. As for the proposed SDGs, and as already mentioned, broad reference to the age dimension is made in goal 3 on health and in its target 3.8 on achieving universal coverage, access to quality essential services, medicines and vaccines.

44.   In the area of place and mobility, while the proposed SDGs focus on the provision of access to safe, affordable and sustainable transport systems (target 11.2) and to inclusive public spaces (target 11.7) for older persons, the Cairo Declaration does not directly touch on the issues of affordability and sustainability, rather focusing on the accessibility dimension by calling to account for the specific needs and functional capacities of older persons in the design of housing layouts, public buildings, public transport systems and public spaces.

45.   In the area of governance and accountability, the Cairo Declaration calls for the development of policies and legislation to support the implementation of recommendations made under the area of dignity and human rights, such as promoting active ageing and the role of the family in the provision of care. It also places emphasis on the importance of participation and partnerships by calling for the following: (a) engagement of civil society; (b) creation of networks for older persons; (c) participation of older persons in national development processes; and (d) establishment of partnerships between different capacity-building providers to train health professionals, the police and other personnel dealing with older persons to fight abuse. The Declaration also calls for adopting a human rights approach in advocating for and dealing with issues of concern to older persons, including in the formulation of policies; and for mainstreaming ageing into development processes and across all sectors. Moreover, the Cairo Declaration stresses the need for research and data by recommending that scientific research on the situation of older persons be conducted so that their needs are better identified; that regional and international capacity-building support in the field of research, collection and dissemination of data on older persons be increased; and that such data be used to inform policymaking. The importance of data is also emphasised in the proposed SDGs, which include a target on the provision of technical support to countries in the collection of reliable data disaggregated by age and disseminated in a timely manner (means of implementation 17.18).

D. PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

46.   The two frameworks call for promoting and upholding human dignity and the rights of persons with disabilities. They however differ, as in the case of other sociodemographic groups, in the formulation and level of detail. The Cairo Declaration stresses the need to sign and ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol, which touch on all issues of concern to persons with disabilities, including social protection; employment; health; education; inclusion; accessibility; and equality and non-discrimination. The Convention also addresses issues of governance, such as participation, the amendment of laws, regulations, customs and practices that are discriminatory to persons with disabilities and the need to mainstream disability into sustainable development strategies. Issues of governance are further stressed in the Cairo Declaration, which specifically calls for the adoption of laws and measures that promote the rights of persons with disabilities, in addition to the amendment of existing laws and measures to eliminate discrimination against this group. The importance of strengthening capacities in the collection and dissemination of high-quality and timely data on persons with disabilities is highlighted in both the proposed SDGs and the Declaration, with the latter also mentioning the provision of support to enhance research and analysis. The proposed SDGs also make specific reference to the education and employment of persons with disabilities in addition to their empowerment and inclusion, as indicated in paragraph 30 of the present document.

47.   In the area of place and mobility, while the proposed SDGs refer to the safety, inclusiveness and accessibility of transport systems and public spaces, the Cairo Declaration calls on States to ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability, which includes the accessibility dimension. On health, while, as mentioned earlier, the proposed SDGs do not make specific reference to the sociodemographic groups of interest to the present analysis, the Cairo Declaration underlines the need to guarantee access to affordable and good quality health and social services for persons with disabilities.

VI. CONCLUSION AND KEY MESSAGES

48.   Both the proposed SDGs and the Cairo Declaration place focus on population issues as a key tool for achieving sustainable development. The two frameworks highlight the needs and dynamics of key groups, showing strong political support for mainstreaming population issues in sustainable development policies and programmes. In the light of this analysis, the following recommendations are presented for consideration by ESCWA member States.

49.   In the framework of the current global negotiations on sustainable development goals, the following actions should be taken:

(a)   Maintaining population goals and targets, including those that specifically address the different sociodemographic groups and the vulnerable, in SDGs;

(b)   Formulating indicators that take into consideration population aspects and dynamics, especially those affecting the lives of the most vulnerable;

(c)   Ensuring that means of implementation dealing with population issues and sociodemographic groups remain part and parcel of SDGs;

(d)   Pushing to reintegrate a specific reference to displaced persons and refugees in SDGs, at the level of relevant targets and means of implementation;

(e)   Encouraging close coordination between National Population Councils and member States' permanent missions in New York to ensure coherence and evidence-based advocacy.

50.   On issues related to population and development in national and sectoral policies in the Arab region, the following actions should be considered:

(a)   Committing to the implementation of the 2013 Cairo Declaration, adopted as a road map to guide work on population and development issues in the Arab region beyond 2014, and ensuring that the plans drawn by States to operationalize the Declaration are in line with the proposed SDGs;

(b)   Promoting more responsible patterns of consumption and production together with effective management of population growth to help reduce pressure on the environment and natural resources; population growth management will also allow for greater investment in the health and education of individuals, positively contributing to the three pillars of sustainable development;

(c)   Enhancing the engagement of all stakeholders, including youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, international migrants where relevant, and civil society organizations concerned with issues of importance to these groups, with a view to advance their social, economic and political participation and maximize their contribution to sustainable development. This would entail:

(i)   Improving access to information;

(ii) Respecting the freedom of association;

(iii) Enhancing institutional arrangements, governing procedures, communication channels and evaluation and accountability mechanisms to enable the systematic engagement by sociodemographic groups and their participation in decision-making processes;

(iv) Giving due consideration to the contribution of population groups to the design, implementation and appraisal of policies, strategies, plans and programmes;

(d)   Elaborating policies for the empowerment of youth that address their needs and priorities, in line with the World Programme of Action for Youth;

(e)   Encouraging regional consultative processes on the issues of mobility and international migration to help minimize negative impacts and maximize opportunities, such as reducing the transaction costs of remittances, providing social protection to migrants, and enabling pension portability along with other social entitlements and a fair recognition of qualifications;

(f)   Signing and ratifying or acceding to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, and the Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees;

(g)   Adopting a rights-based approach to dealing with issues of concern to older persons, and participating in the third review and appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing;

(h)   Signing and ratifying or acceding to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol, and addressing gaps in implementation and monitoring;

(i)   Enhancing the regular collection, dissemination and accessibility of data disaggregated by demographic characteristics such as age, sex, disability, location and migratory status to support the formulation of evidence-based development policies, strategies, plans and programmes.