

# ICPD at 15 Regional Forum

## A Framework for Addressing the Population and Development Challenges in the European Region

### Concept Note

#### Background

The population challenges faced by the countries in the European region<sup>1</sup> are increasingly in the centre of the political, expert, and public debates. This is understandable, given that throughout most of Europe, period fertility indicators have reached very low levels and countries are facing rapidly changing age structures along with the prospect of population decrease. The fertility decline is driven by changes in reproductive behaviour that manifest themselves *inter alia* in significantly later childbearing, a weakening link between marriage and procreation, increasing diversity of living arrangements, and in some countries the emergence of childlessness as a chosen life style.

In the western parts of the region, improvements in health care and quality of life have resulted in unprecedented declines of mortality in the older ages, and increases in longevity, which have further contributed to the process of population ageing. In the eastern parts of the region, the populations have not benefited from these achievements. In some countries of the post-Soviet space life expectancy at birth in 2005 was lower than that in 1965. The negative trends in mortality in these countries affect primarily men, as a result of which the sex differences in life expectancy are particularly high.

Migratory movements have also intensified and the flows have diversified. In the countries of destination concerns are raised about the abilities of the host societies to accommodate the increasing number of migrants. The countries of origin are also apprehensive about the demographic and developmental impact of the emigration, particularly when this is combined with natural population decrease. Some countries in the region find themselves in the situation of being both countries of origin, destination, and transit.

The countries in Central Asia (with the exception of Kazakhstan) and some countries in South East Europe are still distinct demographically, particularly because of the relatively high levels of fertility and continuing population growth. These countries also continue to face challenges in the provision of reproductive health services, in achieving gender equality, and in other areas central to the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). The population trends in these countries, however, suggest that soon they might be facing issues similar to those in other parts of the region, and would thus benefit from the lessons learnt, so as to better adapt to the new demographic realities. Last but not least, emerging issues, particularly those related to the population-environment/climate change nexus, are now perceived throughout the European region as a priority.

The global financial crisis will affect the above trends and patterns through several different mechanisms. These include changes in reproductive and other demographically significant behaviours as a response to the changed economic circumstances, changes in the pull and push factors affecting migration, and changes in the abilities of governments to pursue social policies. Addressing the population and development implications of the global financial crisis in the European region is an imperative given its importance and policy relevance.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless stated otherwise, throughout this note we define the European region in the broader sense used by the United Nations and other international organizations, which includes Europe, Asian parts of the former Soviet Union, North America and Israel.

In Cairo, in 1994 the international community agreed on a Programme of Action with a 20 year time-scope to address the population and development challenges that the world is facing. The ICPD agenda is still relevant, and the region needs to take account of where it stands in implementing it, and offer a vision for the road ahead. Hence, convening a regional forum on the population and development challenges in Europe is now more topical than ever.

### **Purpose and Objectives**

In this context, the Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECARO) of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) is convening in partnership with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the European Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development (EPF), the European Network of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), and the State Planning Organization of Turkey (SPO) a major forum to be held on **12-13 November 2009, in Istanbul, Turkey**. Such a forum, hosted with ICPD at 15 as a background, will take stock of where countries in the region stand in implementing the ICPD Programme of Action, through the prism of the MDGs. It will also explore ideas and opportunities that could guide Europe through the population challenges that it is facing. It would distinguish itself from more technical meetings by aiming both to contribute to a better understanding of the population situation in the region and to offer a vision on the way forward in Europe's effort to tackle its population issues. The idea behind the Forum is to bring all the knowledge, experience and expertise together to advance the understanding on what and how future population and development policies need to achieve in order to address Europe's population challenges.

The participants in the Forum will include Government officials, Members of Parliament, researchers and academic experts, as well as representatives of NGOs. The technical participation will be multi-disciplinary, relying not just on population expertise but also on expertise from the fields of reproductive health, economics, finance, culture, and related social sciences. The agenda of the Forum is developed in consultation with relevant stakeholders. It is proposed that it would draw also on the recommendations and conclusions of the series of preparatory meetings, which UNFPA/EECARO is organizing in the period leading to the Forum, as well as other ICPD at 15 events (incl. the NGO Forum on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Development, the 4<sup>th</sup> International Parliamentarians' Conference on the Implementation of the ICPD, the High Level Meeting on Maternal Health, etc.).

### **Logistics:**

UNFPA Turkey Country Office serves as the local secretariat of the Forum. A separate logistical note will be sent upon receipt of nominations of Government delegations. Please send the nominations and any inquiries to the following address until 15 September 2009.

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