



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

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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.

