



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.

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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.

