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DRAFT

Conclusions of the Regional Population Meeting

Adopted by the Meeting at its final session on 9 December 1998

I. Main issues and policy challenges

1. Europe and North America, herein referred as “the region” are in the *avant-garde* of unprecedented global demographic change. After having led the world through the demographic transition, the region is pioneering demographic developments heretofore unknown to human society. Some of these are occurring only in the countries with market economies, in the setting of unparalleled prosperity; others are taking place almost everywhere, including countries with economies in transition which are experiencing the greatest difficulties with bringing their economies back to the path of sustained growth.

2. Fertility is at present below replacement in large areas of Europe and shows no sign of recovery. In some countries, it has approached the level that is one half of the number of children per women necessary for the replacement of generations, a phenomenon never observed during peacetime. Concurrently, the profound transformation of the family continues unabated, resulting in ever-growing pluralism of family and household forms. The status of women is higher than anywhere else in the world, however, gender inequity persists in many countries.

3. Persistent low fertility contributes to population ageing throughout the region, promising to push the share of older persons to one third or more of the population in the next century. In western Europe and North America, major improvements in old-age mortality are reinforcing this trend. In each and every country population ageing profoundly influences the economy and labour market, the fiscal system and public spending, and the family and community. It increasingly taxes the social contract between generations. As the share of older persons continues to grow apace, countries are striving to create conditions conducive to

* The Regional Population Meeting is in the work programme of the Conference of European Statisticians.

active and healthy ageing.

4. The inhabitants of western countries enjoy some of the most favourable survival conditions in the world. Those in a number of central and east European countries are less fortunate. In this part of Europe, especially men of working-age suffer from mortality conditions as bad if not worse than those encountered in many developing countries. Excess male mortality is alarmingly large in some instances, exceeding 10 years of life expectancy at birth. Also, reproductive health in much of central and east European countries is inadequate. Reliance on induced abortion and limited use of modern contraceptives remains the norm rather than the exception in many of these countries.

5. Migration movements affecting the region have abated in recent years. However, migration pressures in parts of the region, notably in North America and the countries bordering the Mediterranean sea continue to rise. This is primarily due to the arrival of illegal migrants. In many instances, full integration of migrants into the host society remains to be achieved. While the integration of migrants is the agreed objective across the region, the countries on either side of the Atlantic continue to hold different views on immigration.

6. Population developments pose manifold, complex and far-reaching challenges to families and local communities, civil society and the business community, governments and the international community at large. Demographic changes are so pervasive that many societal institutions respond to them as a matter of course, although often with considerable delay. It is particularly governments at various levels that are challenged by the ever-changing demographic landscape of the ECE countries. The challenge arises in part from the fact that many demographic processes are comparatively slow, the result of which is that the cumulative impact of those processes manifests themselves only in the long run. Where this impact is anticipated in a timely fashion and policies are not delayed, adjustments to demographic change is more successful.

II. Priority themes

7. Cognisant of the fact that salient population issues in the region are numerous, the Meeting selected the following four priority themes for its deliberations:

- Fertility and reproductive rights;
- Mortality and health, including reproductive health;
- Population ageing;
- International migration.

8. These four themes were also selected as the substantive priority areas for the discussions at the European Population Conference (EPC) (Geneva, 1993), a meeting of the ECE region in preparation for the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) (Cairo, 1994). The final document adopted by the EPC contained recommendations for action pertaining to the four areas, reflecting the views and concerns of European and North American countries on their population issues at the time. It also included recommendations to the Governments of this region pertaining to international co-operation in the field of population and the generation and utilisation of policy-relevant knowledge. As appropriate, the EPC Recommendations were reflected in the ICPD *Programme of Action*.

9. In the intervening short period of time since Geneva and Cairo, population developments in many parts of the world have taken a new turn. Developments that five years

ago appeared to be largely European specificities are now widely recognised to be taking place in other parts of world, particularly in east and south-east Asia. Below-replacement fertility and accelerating population ageing with its many ramifications are rapidly spreading. For example, in 1997, there were 51 countries in the world at or below-replacement fertility and 44 per cent of the world population resided therein. In view of this, the demographic developments currently characterising the ECE region and the policy responses they are attracting are taking on a wider relevance. Experiences with the unprecedented demographic change in the region, particularly in Europe, are certain to elicit interest beyond its borders in the years to come. This has meant that the need to review and revise the themes of the EPC during the Meeting has taken on added urgency.

10. The starting point for the deliberations at the Meeting was the EPC *Recommendations* and the ICPD *Programme of Action*. The Meeting fully reaffirmed the agreements and commitments contained therein. It concluded that the outcome of the Meeting should be supportive of, consistent with and based on these two documents. It also resolved that the outcome should build on and go beyond the *Recommendations* and the *Programme of Action* so that it fully addresses recent developments in the region.

11. The Regional Population Meeting adopted the conclusions contained below and requested the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe that the Report of the Meeting, along with its annexes, be submitted to the Conference of European Statisticians for its consideration and adoption. The Meeting also requested the Executive Secretary of the ECE to simultaneously transmit these conclusions to the Secretary-General of the United Nations. It also requested the chairperson of the Meeting to concurrently transmit the conclusions to the Preparatory Committee of the Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly for the quinquennial review and appraisal of the implementation of the *Programme of Action*.

III. Conclusions

III.1 Fertility and reproductive rights

12. Conceiving a child, bringing pregnancy to term and giving birth to a baby are events in the life of women that ultimately influence the way families, communities and national populations reproduce. These events, eminently intimate, are outcomes of decisions of women and their partners that are nowadays taken in a rapidly evolving environment. In many ECE countries, society does not any longer look upon extra-marital births, non-marital unions and divorce with disapproval. Partly in response to this, young people increasingly choose to live together without getting married, at least for a while, and sometimes opt to have children in consensual unions. Marriages end in divorce more often than in the past while consensual unions with or without children are inherently more unstable than marriages. In many countries, couples increasingly delay the entry into marriage and the onset of parenthood. A growing share of young people chose to remain childless while those who have children opt for fewer than their parents used to have. The result is that families of today are both smaller and far more diverse in form than the families of a generation ago. The numbers of children born into them do not suffice for the replacement of families, communities and national populations. These novel developments, which pervade some areas of the ECE region much more than others, pose new challenges to policies and programmes focusing on reproduction and the family.

13. ***Support to families with children.*** Aware of the difficulties, complexities and the economic burden of raising children in industrialised societies, most of the ECE countries have, over past decades, had programmes of support to families with children. In recent years, family policies have continued to evolve, striving, among other things, to enable working couples to simultaneously fulfil their professional and parental aspirations. The approach has been two-pronged: to accommodate the needs of working couples for more flexible work arrangements, including longer and better-compensated parental leave and to provide them with improved child-care services. Also, these policies have continued to meet, in varying degrees, the private cost of bearing and raising children. Where public finance considerations required it, child or family allowances became income-tested or were reduced in real terms. Governments and the business community in the ECE countries will continue to pursue programmes and measures in support of the family; countries in transition, however, expect that regaining some lost ground in this area will depend on economic recovery. Improving the living conditions for families with children will be the best way to avoid unsustainably low fertility levels. A broad and fair family policy taking proper account of the needs for both sexes will contribute to the same aims.

14. ***Status of women and gender equity.*** ECE countries remain in the forefront of efforts to improve the status of women and gender equity. Their commitment to this goal over a long time period, vigorously promoted and endorsed in both Geneva and Cairo, has resulted in the condition of women that are among the best in the world. Since Geneva and Cairo, many ECE countries have continued their efforts to improve these conditions by, among other things, assisting couples striving to better balance their parental and work roles. In some countries in transition, the gains made in reaching this objective have been under threat and even reversed in recent years, however, this has been a result of economic and social adversity rather than an abandonment of the ideal. Governments and civil society should continue to promote conditions in the ECE region that “further political, economic and social equality between men and women, including equal opportunities for education, training and employment, as well as equality in family responsibilities.”

15. ***Reproductive rights.*** The concept of reproductive rights has been pioneered, among others, by a number of countries in the ECE region. The citizens of many of these countries, particularly those with market economies that have completed contraceptive transition, enjoy these rights. These countries, in recent years, have made great strides in the area of medically-assisted reproduction, making it possible, among other things, for sub-fecund couples to share in the joy of parenthood. In the future, the challenge will be to benefit from emerging therapeutic techniques while keeping in check ethically questionable approaches and procedures. In countries in transition, reproductive rights, including “the right to be informed of and to have access to safe, effective, affordable and acceptable methods of family planning” remain to be acquired by the majority of people of reproductive age. Much has been accomplished in this area in the last half decade, however, a great deal remains to be done. Governments and civil society of these countries, with assistance from the international community, will press on with the unfinished task.

III.2 *Mortality and health, including reproductive health*

16. The equality with respect to survival that human beings enjoy at the time of birth declines as they grow, mature, age and approach death. This is a reality that individuals, families and society face daily. Within the ECE region, survival inequalities have been enormous in recent decades, indeed they have increased in recent years. They are particularly

large across Europe, being one of the legacies of the past East-West division of the continent. In countries with market economies, people live healthier and longer lives than ever before. For the vast majority, death occurs at old or very old age. The increase in longevity has also been accompanied by older people enjoying healthier lives, as a result of advances in combating certain degenerative diseases and disabilities. Disconcertingly, however, major socio-economic differentials in mortality persist. Most of the countries with economies in transition have not shared in this post-war feat of Western society. Having fallen behind the western advances in survival since the 1960s, most of the countries of central and eastern Europe experienced fresh setbacks, including increase or further stagnation of mortality from around 1990. Only a few central European countries emerged as bright stars on the otherwise dark sky. Premature death, particularly among men in their prime years and early old age is frequent, depriving families of their husbands and fathers and society of its productive members. Women fare much better, however, they lag considerably behind their sisters in the West. As a result of the years of misguided state policies, their reproductive health is still woefully inadequate.

17. ***Sustaining progress.*** Advances towards unprecedentedly healthy and long lives in many countries with market economies have continued unabated in the years since Geneva and Cairo. This, however, should not be a reason for complacency. As good health and longevity are unreservedly cherished by human beings, a variety of challenges remain. Health promotion, an objective accorded high priority in Geneva, remains as important as ever, especially among the young and disadvantaged. The same is true of the need to protect the natural, work and living environment. Further advances in the fight against degenerative diseases, cancer in particular, based on concerted medical research and development and further gains in lifestyles conducive to good health remain a high priority. Postponing the onset of and bringing under increased control the incidence of disability, particularly in old age is another priority. At the same time, in this era of rapidly rising health expenditures, rendering the health sector cost-effective and efficient is as important as ever. As resources for health improvements are perennially insufficient, ethical questions surrounding health-care rationing will be increasingly faced.

18. ***Reversing adverse trends.*** It is widely recognised that many countries with economies in transition are in the midst of a health and mortality crisis. In particular, in the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Baltic countries, where the health status and mortality levels, particularly of men are grossly inadequate. National health systems have deteriorated in the recent years and are in a state of disrepair. Only a handful of central European countries have escaped this fate. It is not obvious what should be priorities for a strategy to overcome the crisis, however, it appears that they should include the following. Firstly, the positive experience that western countries have had with health promotion should be applied to the countries with economies in transition. Public campaigns, which cost relatively little, against alcohol abuse, smoking, inadequate diet and other unhealthy personal practices should be vigorously pursued as they are bound to have major impact, even in the short term. Secondly, primary health care needs to be reinvigorated so that gains in health and survival at relatively low levels of expenditure that typically result from the spread of basic health care can be realised. And thirdly, health care systems in these countries need to be rebuilt and reformed in response to the current demands on them, but also in line with financial realities of these countries.

19. ***Reproductive health.*** Similar to health in general, reproductive health varies greatly across the region. In countries with market economies the status of reproductive health and

family planning is among the highest in the world, in the countries in transition it lags considerably behind. The vestiges of past policies and practices are still visible, but to a lesser degree in central than in eastern Europe. In some countries in transition, the reliance on induced abortion as a fertility control method is rapidly being replaced by the use of modern contraceptives. The progress along this path is, however, far slower in the majority of the countries, especially those where state policies in the past banned or discouraged the use of modern contraceptive methods and, instead, promoted induced abortion. Government and civil society in these countries are fully aware of the task ahead: to vigorously promote the transition from induced abortion to modern contraception and to make further efforts at raising the reproductive health status of men and women to Western European levels. They also realise that the alarmingly rapid spread of sexually transmitted diseases, AIDS in particular, must be brought under control. This will require, however, continuing solidarity and assistance of the international community.

III.3 Population ageing

20. Active and healthy older persons are increasingly conspicuous members of the industrial society. Their growing numbers are a testimony to the twin major achievement of this century, namely increased life expectancy and improved health. Having lived in a society where subsequent generations have had ever fewer children per woman, older persons today enjoy the status of a sizeable minority of the population, one that is increasingly asserting itself. The relatively high shares of the older population are certain to increase further in each and every country of the region, turning them gradually into truly greying societies. While these trends are common for the entire region, the status of older persons varies greatly across the countries. In the western countries, the older persons of today are considerably better off than those of a generation ago: they are better educated and healthier, more active and mobile, more economically secure and wealthier as well as blessed by more years of co-survival with spouses, children and grandchildren. In many countries in central and eastern Europe, the situation is different. Although the older persons are increasingly better educated, the economic downturn during the recent transition to market economy has left many of them without sufficient retirement income. As a result, many have joined the new poor of this part of Europe, without prospects for major improvements in their living standards during the remaining years of life. Their health status is marginally better and sometimes inferior to that of the prime-age people, one of the most vulnerable groups in many east European countries. Due to high prime-age mortality among men in the past, a large majority of older persons are widowed women.

21. **Active ageing.** Over the last few decades, the improvements in life expectancy and health, which have been much more pronounced in countries with market economies than in countries with economies in transition, have occurred concurrently with the progressively earlier withdrawal from the labour force. This trend towards earlier retirement is contrary to the novel concept of “active ageing,” - the desire and ability of many older persons to continue work or other socially productive activities well into their later years. Partly as a result of this, recently instituted reforms of public pension schemes in some countries are reversing the decline in the age of retirement. It is certain that the pension scheme reforms in other countries will pursue, among other things, this same objective. However, many more policy options need to be explored in order to promote active ageing with due regard being paid to individual choices and circumstances of older persons. Disincentives to labour force participation among older persons, particularly the youngest-old need to be removed. Also, barriers to flexible and part-time employment among older persons ought to be lowered. Life-

long learning, the promotion of volunteerism and family care-giving among older persons also need to be supported. These are challenges for Governments, civil society and the business community.

22. ***Social and income security.*** The increase in the proportion of older persons has placed financial strains on the social security systems, and particularly the public pension systems, of many ECE countries. As the share of older people continues to mount, these pressures are certain to increase, necessitating early action to restore balances or prevent deficits from emerging. The objective is to provide guarantees of income security and of health-care and social-welfare entitlements of older people into the next century. A number of countries have already instituted the necessary reforms in recent years, promoting, among other things, active ageing and, in particular, later retirement. Pension reforms will continue in the years ahead as Governments continue to pursue the triple objective of income security of older persons, greater intergenerational and intragenerational equality, and financial sustainability of pension and other programmes. As there are various approaches to social security and, in particular, income security of older persons, the ECE countries will be making choices according to their preferences. Countries with economies in transition, where social security and pension schemes are in need of urgent repair will undertake reforms by learning from positive and negative experiences with alternative public and private programmes in western countries. While pursuing the social security and pension reforms, the ECE countries will seek to ensure that any resultant changes in the contract between generations contribute toward creating a future “society for all ages”.

23. ***Care.*** The oldest-old, typically defined as persons aged 80 and over, are the fastest rising population group in the ECE region, growing in many countries at rates ranging between three and four per cent per annum. As the incidence of disability, frailty or debilitating diseases is the highest among the oldest-old, the demand for care among older persons, including the demand for long-term care is growing rapidly. This trend is being reinforced, among other things, by the rise in prevalence of living alone among older people. Families, communities and public institutions have been adapting to this development and further progress has been achieved toward meeting the demand for care for older persons. However, the progress is uneven as it presupposes often complex adjustments to existing legislative, financial and labour market regulations. It is particularly slow in countries lacking means and experience in this new area. In the years ahead, the challenge will increasingly be to find a sustainable mix of the various forms of care, including formal and informal care for older persons. Civil society as well as public and private institutions will be called upon to provide adequate infrastructure and services for aged persons who cannot rely on their immediate family.

III. 4 *International migration*

24. The consolidation of the nation state in this century has increasingly placed limitations on individuals and families seeking to move and settle at will. Nowadays, through much of Europe and North America, the entry, stay and employment of migrants is closely regulated by receiving countries. However, there was a major departure from this rule when the European Union countries recently have allowed their nationals to move, stay and work freely anywhere within the borders of the group. Nevertheless, these new rights do not apply to the majority of migrants within the region. Many of them, no matter whether they are workers, family members, asylum seekers or refugees are subjected to stricter rules but choose to abide by them. In return, they enjoy the rights and benefits that in many instances are identical to or

approach those of the citizens of the countries where they find themselves. Persons in need of asylum or temporary protection also enjoy rights, some of which are guided by humanitarian considerations. Many other migrants, the numbers of whom are not known but believed to be on the rise, join the ranks of undocumented migrants. By moving or residing illegally, sometimes with the assistance of criminal organizations involved in trafficking, they place themselves on the other side of the law. As a result, they are frequently exploited, discriminated against or abused; their rights are violated; and they can be drawn relatively easily into other unlawful activities. When illegally residing in a foreign country, their integration into the host society is far more difficult or even doomed unless they are pardoned, for example, by a mass amnesty. Their very existence among documented foreigners sometimes creates resentments and prejudices on part of the host society that jeopardises the well-being and integration of the law-abiding migrants.

25. **Managing migration.** Since the beginning of the 1990s, Canada and the United States, as well as many European countries, irrespective of their inclination towards international migration, experienced a considerable net influx of migrants. Worldwide economic and social disparities continued and political and military conflicts erupted and spread and this occasioned major migration movements towards and within the region. As a result, among other things, asylum laws and procedures have been modified by many countries as it became obvious that asylum procedures have been used not only by genuine refugees but also by migrants whose motivation was economic. After the removal of past travel and migration restrictions in the countries with economies in transition, the Governments of these countries struggled to place the national borders under control. However, as documented migration subsided, it is widely believed that undocumented movements, often supported by trafficking swelled. Therefore, the long-term challenge of restoring control over and of successfully managing population movements remains intact in many countries. The extent in which this objective will be met will depend not only upon measures of receiving countries, but also on social and economic development of sending countries. It is, therefore, in the interest of all countries – sending and receiving - to promote development, *inter alia*, through free trade, investment and aid.

26. **Co-ordinating policies.** Democratic societies that honour individual human rights will always face some immigration by non-citizens. Under the circumstances, the best the Governments can do is to guide and influence migratory movements that are, by their very nature, changeable and unpredictable. This, however, requires replacing previous piecemeal and reactive policies by a set of comprehensive and proactive policies designed to deal both with swings in prevailing trends and with sudden lurches into new directions. The aim is to develop co-ordinated, integrated measures capable of managing migration in an orderly manner, so as to maximise opportunities and benefits to individual migrants and to host societies, and to minimise trafficking and illegal movements. Given the internationalism of migration, inter-state co-operation is a *sine qua non* for progress in this area. Therefore, national policies will be increasingly co-ordinated regionally to ensure the greatest possible degree of agreement and harmonisation.

27. **Promoting integration.** The economic and social integration of resident legal migrants has continued since Geneva and Cairo. The framework for integration has been in place for many years in countries with market economies and continues to evolve. The integration is fraught with challenges and difficulties, however, in spite of this, the process continues, in large measure due to the commitment of the host societies and migrant communities. The relatively small but rapidly growing foreign communities in countries with economies in

transition is a new phenomenon that has caught these countries unprepared. In the future, as was the case in the past, the different countries will pursue alternative approaches to integration. This is a sovereign right of the receiving countries. At the same time, the ECE countries will uphold the principles of integration agreed upon at Geneva, including the respect for “different national, ethnic and cultural origins of immigrants” and the display of “open attitude towards their cultural, religious and other values, as long these are compatible with the laws and fundamental values of the host societies.” Although Governments cannot dictate integration and good community relations, they can and will, working with civil society, promote integration, *inter alia*, by means of relevant education and confidence-building measures in all communities. Also, they will work towards eliminating the causes behind the marginalisation of any minority group from society as a whole.

IV. New co-operation opportunities

28. The end of the Cold War has created conditions for a reintegration of Europe, allowing countries on the two sides of the former East-West divide to co-operate as equal partners in many spheres of life. In the population field, the potential for co-operation is as great as in many other areas. Since Geneva and Cairo, the co-operation in this field has taken off in many different directions, drawing some groups of countries closer than others. Opportunities for expanding co-operation, however, remain vast and the challenge for the ECE countries will be as to how to exploit this potential. Possibilities for co-operation in policy formulation and implementation, and in population analysis are highly promising. In view of particularly great opportunities for harnessing regional co-operation in population analysis, the Meeting has adopted the document “*Co-operation in Population Analysis*” (Annex 2).