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**Programme implementation and future programme of work
of the Secretariat in the field of population**

Programme implementation and progress of work in the field of population in 2020: Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report contains a review of progress made by the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in implementing its programme of work in the field of population during 2020. It covers the activities of the Division on the analysis of global trends in fertility, mortality, migration, urbanization and population ageing; the preparation of global population estimates and projections; the monitoring of population policies; the analysis of interrelations between population and sustainable development; the dissemination of population data and information; technical cooperation with and capacity development provided to Member States; and the support provided to intergovernmental processes, including through the preparation of reports of the Secretary-General and other parliamentary documents, the organization of expert group meetings and the monitoring of internationally agreed development goals.

The objective of the programme of work in the field of population in 2020 was to improve knowledge of population trends and evidence-based understanding of interactions between population change and sustainable development among both policymakers and the public. The Commission on Population and Development acts as the governing body for the Population Division and thus provides guidance on the work programme as part of its annual session.

The Commission may wish to take note of the report.

* E/CN.9/2021/1.



I. Introduction

1. The Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs is responsible for the implementation of the programme of work on population of the United Nations Secretariat. The programme of work is guided by the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development,¹ by the outcome of the twenty-first special session of the General Assembly on key actions for the further implementation of the Programme of Action (resolution S-21/2, annex) and by the decision of the Assembly to extend the Programme of Action and the key actions for its further implementation beyond the original 20-year time horizon in 2014 (resolution 65/234). The outcomes of other relevant international conferences and summits are also taken into account, including the United Nations Millennium Declaration (resolution 55/2), the Declaration of the High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development (resolution 68/4), the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (resolution 70/1), the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (resolution 71/1) and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (resolution 73/195). In addition, the work of the Division is guided by the resolutions and decisions of the Commission on Population and Development, in particular its resolution 2004/1 on the work programme in the field of population (E/2004/25-E/CN.9/2004/9, chap. I, sect. B), and by other relevant resolutions and decisions of the Assembly and of the Economic and Social Council.

2. As described in the programme budget, the objective of the work programme on population in 2020 was to improve knowledge of population trends and evidence-based understanding of interactions between population change and sustainable development among both policymakers and the public (see A/74/6 (Sect. 9), subprogramme 5, Population). The Commission provided intergovernmental guidance and oversight.

3. The planned result for subprogramme 5, Population, according to the programme budget for 2020 (ibid.), was enhanced accessibility and relevance of data and analysis on population trends to guide the elaboration of development policies by Member States and support them in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

4. The Division collaborates closely with the agencies, funds and programmes and other bodies of the United Nations system in implementing its work programme and in supporting the follow-up to the International Conference on Population and Development. United Nations offices and missions, national Governments, academic researchers, media representatives and the public at large regularly consult with the Division to obtain timely and pertinent data, information and analyses on population patterns and trends and their connection with development issues.

5. The present report provides a summary of the activities and deliverables of the Division during 2020, which included the provision of support to intergovernmental processes, the preparation of reports of the Secretary-General and other parliamentary documents, the monitoring of internationally agreed development goals, the dissemination of population data and information, and technical cooperation. A list of activities and outputs completed in 2020 is presented in the annex to the present report. Reference is also made in the report to work in progress in 2020 that is expected to result in one or more completed outputs in 2021. Where applicable, impacts of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on the Division's work are indicated. Responses to COVID-19 in the Division's deliverables and activities are also noted.

¹ *Report of the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 5–13 September 1994* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.95.XIII.18), chap. I, resolution 1, annex.

II. Fertility and family planning

6. The Population Division published *World Family Planning 2020: Highlights*, which presented regional and global estimates of the contraceptive use and needs for women of reproductive age (15–49 years) between 1990 and 2020, with projections until 2030. The report contained an assessment of trends and inequalities in contraceptive use, regional differences in method choice, the contraceptive needs of young women and adolescents age (15–19 years) and the effects of population growth on past and future changes in the number of contraceptive users. It also illustrated how family planning could assist in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and provided policy recommendations for addressing reproductive health and family planning needs. Furthermore, the report contained a discussion of how the COVID-19 pandemic was adding to the uncertainty of achieving universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services.

7. The Division finalized two in-depth reports on fertility among adolescents: the first provided an examination of fertility among adolescents aged 15–19 years² and the second presented a first-time analysis of new data on the fertility of young adolescents aged 10–14 years to enhance the evidence base in relation to indicator 3.7.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals.³

8. The Division published a comprehensive data set on family planning indicators, *World Contraceptive Use 2020*, which includes survey-based estimates of contraceptive prevalence and of the unmet need for family planning among women of reproductive age (from 15 to 49 years), disaggregated by age, marital status and contraceptive methods used. It includes data from 1,317 surveys for 196 countries or areas.

9. The Division used the information compiled in *World Contraceptive Use 2020* to generate a comprehensive set of annual, model-based estimates and projections of family planning indicators for the period from 1970 to 2030, published as *Estimates and Projections of Family Planning Indicators 2020*. These two data products provide information relevant for the national, regional and global monitoring of indicator 3.7.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals (Proportion of women of reproductive age (aged 15–49 years) who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods).

10. The Division held an expert group meeting on 26 and 27 October 2020 on the evaluation of adolescent fertility data and estimates for reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals. The experts reviewed and discussed approaches to assess, validate and select estimates of the adolescent birth rate of girls under 15 years of age for monitoring and reporting on the Goals, specifically indicator 3.7.2 (Adolescent birth rate (aged 10–14 years; aged 15–19 years) per 1,000 women in that age group). The meeting brought together more than 40 experts from United Nations agencies, research institutions and data producers. The report of the meeting contained a summary of the presentations, discussion and recommendations.⁴

11. Staff members of the Division published a research note entitled “The impact of the COVID-19 crisis on meeting needs for family planning: a global scenario by

² *World Fertility 2019: Early and Later Childbearing among Adolescent Women Aged 15–19 Years* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.20.XIII.12).

³ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, “Fertility among young adolescents at ages 10–14 years: a global assessment” (ST/ESA/SER.A/453), 2020.

⁴ See www.un.org/development/desa/pd/events/EGM-on-the-evaluation-of-adolescent-fertility-data-estimates-for-SDG-reporting.

contraceptive methods used” in the open-access journal *Gates Open Research* on 9 July 2020.⁵

12. The Division participated in the global conference on the measurement of gender equality, entitled “Counted and Visible”, organized by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the Statistics Division on 26 and 27 February 2020. A staff member of the Division made a presentation in a session dedicated to age and gender, on early adolescent fertility, (i.e., the childbearing of girls aged 10 to 14 years), reporting on research undertaken in the context of monitoring indicator 3.7.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals, for which the Division is the custodian agency.

13. Staff members of the Division participated in an expert group meeting on rethinking the gender inequality index,⁶ convened by the United Nations Development Programme and UN-Women on 22 and 23 April 2020, at which the Division’s data sets and publications on family planning indicators were presented, along with suggestions on how to include those indicators in revised women’s empowerment and gender indices.

14. Staff members of the Division also participated in the fourteenth meeting of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Gender Statistics, held virtually between 3 and 7 December 2020, and made a presentation on estimating the impact of COVID-19 on sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, reviewing data sources available for estimating the impact of the pandemic on access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including family planning.

III. Health and mortality

15. The Population Division released *World Mortality 2019*, in which it assessed changes in mortality risks at the global and regional levels, focusing on the period from 1994 to 2015. The report contained a review of the progress made in achieving the survival targets outlined in the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and a discussion of how those targets were subsequently reflected in the Millennium Development Goals and in the Sustainable Development Goals. It presented an evaluation of the progress made by regions and countries in raising levels of life expectancy at birth, focusing on reductions in mortality among children under 5 years of age, women in the reproductive age range, all adults in the working age range and older adults at ages 60 and above.

16. The Division prepared a brief on rising life expectancy at birth in recent decades due to improved survival prospects across the age range. The brief, to be released in 2021, shows that life expectancy at birth increased as a result of progress in the survival of both children and adults, but that the contribution of different ages depends on the stage of the demographic transition.

17. The Division contributed a chapter on differential success in mitigating the COVID-19 pandemic to *How COVID-19 is Changing the World: A Statistical Perspective (Volume II)*, produced by the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities. The chapter outlined different patterns of infection in groups of countries, and it was concluded that stopping the uncontrolled spread of the virus required a coordinated strategy, clear messaging and social solidarity. Even without a

⁵ Aisha Dasgupta, Vladimira Kantorová and Philipp Ueffing, “The impact of the COVID-19 crisis on meeting needs for family planning: a global scenario by contraceptive methods used”, ver. 2, *Gates Open Research*, art. No. 4:102, 2020.

⁶ See <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/undp-un-women-expert-group-meeting-gender-indices>.

vaccine, countries could take decisive action to mitigate the pandemic and to create the conditions required for economies to reopen safely. The Division also served as co-editor of the volume.

18. The Division decided to establish, with the World Health Organization (WHO), a Technical Advisory Group on COVID-19 mortality assessment, which will serve as a broad scientific and strategic platform to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and the application of methods on COVID-19 mortality. A primary role of the Technical Advisory Group will be to advise and support efforts by WHO and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to assist Member States in obtaining accurate estimates of numbers of deaths attributable to the direct and indirect impacts of the pandemic. The membership profile of the Technical Advisory Group will, accordingly, cover a wide range of expertise and skills. Members will be leading experts in COVID-19 mortality statistics and research, with expertise in epidemiology, demography, official statistics and other relevant areas, drawn from international agencies, national statistical offices, academic institutions and elsewhere. The first meeting of the Technical Advisory Group will be convened early in 2021.

19. The Division participated in a technical meeting of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) Reference Group on Estimates, Modelling and Projections Methods, held from 21 to 24 April 2020. *World Population Prospects* and *World Urbanization Prospects* have been used by UNAIDS as input to the modelling of the HIV/AIDS epidemic worldwide, and the Division has relied on UNAIDS epidemiological information for the demographic modelling of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

IV. International migration

20. In 2020, the Population Division developed a new set of estimates of numbers, or stock, of international migrants for all 232 countries and areas of the world since 1990. The 2020 revision of the International Migrant Stock data set took into consideration the impact of the disruptions to international migration through the first half of 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The data set also provided updated information on the numbers and trends in international migration classified by age group and sex and by country of origin and destination, as well as up-to-date information on the global number and distribution of refugees and asylum seekers.

21. The Division prepared *International Migration 2020: Highlights*, which contains analyses of the levels of and trends in international migration produced by the Division. Estimates of international migrants by country of origin, destination, age and gender are derived from the 2020 revision of the International Migrant Stock data set. The publication also provides an overview of policies to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration using data from the World Population Policies 2019: International Migration Policies data set for 111 countries that responded to the international migration module of the twelfth United Nations Inquiry among Governments on Population and Development.

22. The Division acts as focal point of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs for the United Nations Network on Migration.⁷ The Division co-leads the working group aimed at enhancing national capacities in the collection, analysis and dissemination of migration data. It also participated in working-level meetings of the Executive Committee and the annual meeting of the Network, assisted the Under-

⁷ The Network, established by the Secretary-General in 2018, seeks to ensure effective, timely and coordinated system-wide support for the implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. For details, see <https://migrationnetwork.un.org/>.

Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs in participating in two meetings of Principals and contributed to joint statements and guidance notes prepared by the Network. The Division also provided input to the first biennial report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (A/75/542), prepared under the auspices of the Network. The report provided an assessment of the activities of the United Nations system in support of the Global Compact and the functioning of the institutional arrangements to support its implementation.

23. The Division participated in the International Forum on Migration Statistics, which was held in Cairo from 19 to 21 January 2021. A biennial event co-organized by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Forum highlights the increasing relevance of international migration in the context of sustainable development and supports the global monitoring of progress on migration issues in follow-up to both the 2030 Agenda and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

24. The Division provided input to the policy brief of the Secretary-General entitled “COVID-19 and people on the move”, which was released in June 2020, and supported the participation of the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs in a webinar on the brief on 17 June 2020.

25. A staff member of the Division was a discussant in the expert group meeting on *Asia-Pacific Migration Report 2020*, convened virtually by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific on 29 and 30 July 2020.

V. Global population estimates and projections

26. The preparation of the official United Nations population estimates and projections for all countries and areas of the world is a key part of the work of the Population Division. The data are used in the calculation of many of the key development indicators commonly employed by the United Nations system, including for more than one third of the indicators used to monitor progress made in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. They are used extensively by United Nations entities and the general public and are widely considered to provide the most authoritative set of demographic data describing population levels and trends around the world. In 2020, these data took on additional importance as the world was responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. More than 1,200 studies focusing on population and health issues regarding COVID-19 relied on *World Population Prospects* for international population estimates, notably among populations of older people. Studies using data from *World Population Prospects* included influential epidemiological modelling studies that were instrumental in guiding the initial policy decision-making in several regions and were critical in helping countries to adopt rapid, decisive and collective action as early as possible. More recently, with more epidemiological data becoming available, the Division’s data have been used in a wide range of new models to refine and evaluate different public health measures (e.g., various COVID-19 planning tools for scenario analysis and short-term forecasts of COVID-19 deaths in low- or middle-income countries).

27. During 2020, the Division continued its work on the development and implementation of a new analytical approach for future revisions of *World Population Prospects* to provide estimates and projections by single year of age and sex and by a one-year time interval, which will supersede the current approach of doing so by five-year periods and five-year age groups. Starting in 2021, the Division will implement major changes in order to better respond to the needs of Member States,

the United Nations system and other users, and to ensure greater compliance with existing international standards for the production of population estimates and projections. All standard demographic relationships will be preserved using the cohort-component framework to account for changes in fertility, mortality and international migration over time, and by age and sex. The upgrade responds to the growing demand for annual population estimates and demographic indicators in order to assess progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, the new approach will lead to greater transparency regarding the empirical data, analytical procedures, methods and assumptions used. Moreover, it will ensure that the production of international estimates follows the best available practices for demographic reconciliation.

28. It is expected that the new framework will help to reduce differences between national estimates of key development indicators and those produced by the United Nations and other international agencies, especially for countries with advanced data systems. In addition, this upgrade will bring *World Population Prospects* in line with the Guidelines for Accurate and Transparent Health Estimates Reporting, which are intended to ensure greater transparency and reproduction of results in the context of global health statistics.

29. The Division held a virtual expert group meeting on methods for the 2021 revision of *World Population Prospects* and beyond from 6 to 8 April 2020.⁸ The meeting brought together nearly 70 participants from the Secretariat, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), United Nations specialized agencies (United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), WHO, the World Bank, UNAIDS), universities and non-profit organizations from more than one dozen countries. Experts shared their experiences of the application of different methods relating to the development of robust annual time series of various demographic indicators (child, adult and old-age mortality, fertility, migration), the production of models to derive abridged and complete mortality and fertility age patterns, and the reconciliation of various demographic components of change to reconstruct coherent populations by age, period and cohort. The meeting provided methodological insights into many remaining challenges in producing *World Population Prospects 2021* and informed the development of new computational procedures.

30. Work continued on the development of a database (DemoData) containing all available statistics that are relevant for the preparation of national population estimates and projections, including enhanced information on underlying data sources, and further work was conducted on the new Division web-based data dissemination platform (Data Portal) to provide access to estimates and projection results for all countries for the *World Population Prospects 2021* release and to enable demand-driven data visualization and database queries for demographic data and underlying empirical data.

31. The Division produced two technical papers on population estimation. The first paper contained a review of the data and methods commonly used by national statistical offices to produce annual time series of population estimates by age and sex, and recommendations on best practices.⁹ The second paper offered a comparison of official population estimates provided by Member States with estimates from *World Population Prospects* and identified causes of discrepancies, showcasing

⁸ See www.un.org/development/desa/pd/events/expert-group-meeting-methods-world-population-prospects-2021-and-beyond.

⁹ Thomas Spooenberg, "Data and methods for the production of national population estimates: an overview and analysis of available metadata", Technical Paper, No. 2020/01 (New York, United Nations, Department of Economics and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2020).

examples in which observed population counts or reported estimates required adjustments.¹⁰

32. The Division co-chaired a task team of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities on the use of population data for the global monitoring of progress made in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The task team was charged with assessing best practices in choosing population data, both for calculating country-specific indicators and for producing regional and global aggregates.

33. The Division collaborated with the Population Division of ECLAC on various tasks relating to the implementation of this new approach for *World Population Prospects* and on a Spanish translation of the *World Population Prospects 2019* methodological report.¹¹

34. The Division participated in an expert group meeting on the Demographic Yearbook system that was organized by the Statistics Division and held from 9 to 12 November 2020.¹² Input from experts was solicited at the gathering regarding best practices and contemporary approaches to demographic data collection, the application of concepts and definitions in national circumstances and improvements of metadata, as well as demographic data and metadata dissemination. Staff from the Division gave two presentations on recommendations for improvements in the metadata on population estimates and vital statistics based on their experiences in using the Demographic Yearbook system.

VI. Population policies

35. In 2020, the Population Division developed the questionnaires and other materials for the implementation of the thirteenth United Nations Inquiry among Governments on Population and Development. The Inquiry, mandated by the General Assembly in 1962, is a long-standing survey used to gather information from Governments on selected population policies and programmes, for the purpose of monitoring progress on the achievement of internationally agreed development goals. The Inquiry documents changes in the views and policies of Governments with respect to population size and growth, population ageing, fertility, reproductive health and family planning, health and mortality, spatial distribution and urbanization and international migration. The scope of the thirteenth Inquiry is focused on measuring two indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals: 10.7.2 (Number of countries that have implemented well-managed migration policies) and 5.6.2 (Number of countries with laws and regulations that guarantee women aged 15–49 years access to sexual and reproductive health care, information and education) (see sect. X below). The thirteenth Inquiry consists of multiple-choice questions organized into two thematic modules: one on reproductive health and another on international migration. The module on reproductive health is implemented with support from UNFPA and the module on international migration is implemented in collaboration with IOM, with support from OECD. The thirteenth Inquiry was launched at the end of October 2020; as at 31 December 2020, 50 Governments had provided responses

¹⁰ François Pelletier, “Census counts, undercounts and population estimates: the importance of data quality evaluation”, Technical Paper, No. 2020/02 (New York, United Nations, Department of Economics and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2020).

¹¹ *World Population Prospects 2019: Methodology of the United Nations Population Estimates and Projections* (United Nations publication, 2019); *Perspectivas de la población mundial 2019: metodología de las Naciones Unidas para las estimaciones y proyecciones de población* (publicación de las Naciones Unidas, 2019).

¹² See <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/meetings/2020/newyork-egm-dyb/>.

to the module on reproductive health and 53 Governments to the module on international migration.

36. The Division released *World Population Policies 2019* and *World Population Policies 2019: Highlights*. The reports outlined government policies and programmes relating to international migration governance, immigration, emigration, return migration, migrant rights, integration, trafficking in persons and migrant smuggling, forced migration, migration and development and diaspora engagement.

VII. Urbanization and spatial distribution

37. The Population Division prepared a policy brief entitled “Policies on spatial distribution and urbanization have broad impacts on sustainable development”.¹³ The brief provided a summary of government policies and programmes to influence the spatial distribution of the population, to improve living conditions of the urban poor and to promote the sustainability of large urban centres using data for 86 countries that had responded to the population ageing and urbanization module of the twelfth United Nations Inquiry among Governments on Population and Development.

VIII. Population ageing, household composition and living arrangements

38. The Population Division released *World Population Ageing 2020: Highlights*, which provided an overview of global and regional trends in population ageing. It also presented trends in living arrangements of older persons and a discussion on preliminary results of an analysis of the susceptibility of older persons to COVID-19. It concluded with a set of policy recommendations. The *Highlights* report was launched on the International Day of Older Persons in October 2020. A more detailed report on world population ageing, *World Population Ageing 2019*, was published early in 2020.

39. The Division published a technical paper¹⁴ in which it described global trends in households and living arrangements of older persons, as well as the data and methods underlying the United Nations database on the households and living arrangements of older persons (2019).¹⁵

40. The Division prepared a policy brief on policies to address population ageing that had been adopted by Governments globally since 2014.¹⁶ The analysis presented draws on the responses provided by Governments to the twelfth United Nations Inquiry among Governments on Population and Development and on the database on the households and living arrangements of older persons.

41. The Division contributed to a policy brief entitled “COVID-19 and older persons: a defining moment for an informed, inclusive and targeted response”,

¹³ United Nations, Department of Economics and Social Affairs, “Policies on spatial distribution and urbanization have broad impacts on sustainable development”, Population Facts, No. 2020/2 (December 2020).

¹⁴ Yumiko Kamiya and Sara Hertog, “Measuring household and living arrangements of older persons around the world: the United Nations database on the households and living arrangements of older persons 2019”, Technical Paper, No. 2020/03 (New York, United Nations, Department of Economics and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2020).

¹⁵ See www.un.org/development/desa/pd/data/living-arrangements-older-persons.

¹⁶ United Nations, Department of Economics and Social Affairs, “Government policies to address population ageing”, Population Facts, No. 2020/1 (October 2020).

prepared by the Division for Inclusive Social Development as part of the policy brief series of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

42. The Division supported the work of the Titchfield City Group on ageing at the technical level by reviewing documents and providing feedback to the technical work undertaken by the Group. The Group was established by the Statistical Commission in 2018 to improve the availability, accessibility and comparability of statistical data in support of ageing-related policymaking.

43. The Division also participated in activities of the Inter-Agency Group on Ageing, an informal network of interested entities of the United Nations that coordinate on issues of relevance to ageing and older persons, identifies areas of cooperation, works together to raise the profile of older persons and ageing issues within the United Nations system, and integrates ageing and older persons into the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.¹⁷

IX. Population and development

44. The Population Division prepared a report entitled *Global Population Growth and Sustainable Development*, which uses the most recent estimates and projections of global demographic trends from *World Population Prospects*. The report, to be released early in 2021, presents how the continued increase in the global population is shaped by trends in fertility, mortality, international migration and population momentum. It also presents an examination of the complex nexus between population growth and sustainable development, considering its three pillars: social, economic and environmental. The report is the first in a series addressing demographic megatrends, which will be produced in a quadrennial cycle. Future reports will focus on population ageing, international migration and urbanization. The series is intended to serve as a knowledge base for policymakers, civil society and researchers, making available data and analysis on the complex interlinkages between demographic processes, social and economic development and the limits of environmental sustainability. The new series of reports will contribute to the global discussion of these important topics and will provide background information and analysis to inform the input of the Division to the deliberations of the Commission on Population and Development and other intergovernmental bodies and processes.

45. The Division co-led the interagency group on demographic trends established by the United Nations Economists' Network and provided substantial input to the report *Shaping the Trends of our Time*, released in September as part of the commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations. The Division contributed mainly to chapter 3, "Demographic trends in an ageing world", which gives a broad global view of the major shifts in ageing and the key linkages to other major development trends and to different areas of the 2030 Agenda.

46. The Division contributed to the preparation of the triennial review of the list of least developed countries. Input and review from the Division were solicited with regard to issues relating to under-5 and maternal mortality estimates for the countries participating in the review, as well as to the effect of COVID-19 on under-5 and maternal mortality in least developed countries.

¹⁷ For more information on the Inter-Agency Group on Ageing, see www.un.org/development/desa/ageing/iaga.html.

X. Support for intergovernmental processes

47. Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic and the inability to hold in-person meetings at the United Nations, the formal meetings of the fifty-third session of the Commission on Population and Development, originally scheduled for 30 March to 3 April 2020, could not be held. At the request of the Chair, the Division convened, on a virtual basis, 16 meetings of the Bureau, informal meetings of Member States and informal consultations on draft proposals. In accordance with Economic and Social Council decisions 2020/205, 2020/206 and 2020/219, the outcomes of the fifty-third session were adopted by way of the silence procedure. The work of the session was concluded on 10 July 2020.

A. Reports of the Secretary-General

48. The Division prepared the report of the Secretary-General on the theme of the fifty-third session of the Commission on Population and Development, “Population, food security, nutrition and sustainable development” (E/CN.9/2020/2). The report focused on three broad themes: concepts, measures and state of food security and nutrition; nutrition, food security and population health, including diets, nutritional habits and burden of disease, hunger and undernutrition, and overweight and obesity; and food security and population change, including population growth, food consumption and sustainability, and rural development, population movements and settlement patterns. Underscored in the report was the need for action to address all forms of malnutrition throughout the life course. To accommodate the increasing demand for food as a result of rising incomes and population growth, a sustainable transformation of food and agricultural systems was required at all levels and in all countries. However, there were no one-size-fits-all solutions; policies must take context into account, including the livelihoods of persons currently employed in agriculture.

49. The Division prepared the report of the Secretary-General on world demographic trends (E/CN.9/2020/5), in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/2. The report provided an overview of demographic trends for the world and by region. It documented four demographic megatrends – population growth, population ageing, urbanization and international migration – each of which was highly relevant to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The report focused on recent demographic changes and on projected trends in the coming decades.

50. In response to General Assembly resolution 73/241, the Division prepared the report of the Secretary-General on international migration and development (A/75/292). The report, which served as a basis for the negotiations on a resolution on international migration and development in the Second Committee, was prepared in consultation with the United Nations Network on Migration. The report presented the most recent global levels and trends in international migration and recent activities undertaken by entities of the United Nations system to support countries in integrating migration considerations into national development plans. It also provided a review of the progress made in measuring the Sustainable Development Goals and targets relating to migration and of the current status of ratification of the main international instruments relating to international migration. Lastly, it offered an overview of efforts made by the international community to convene an international conference on international migration, which culminated in the Intergovernmental Conference to Adopt the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, held in Marrakech, Morocco, on 10 and 11 December 2018.

B. Expert group meetings

51. The Division convened a virtual expert group meeting on population, food security, nutrition and sustainable development from 28 to 30 October 2020, to inform the preparation of the fifty-fourth session of the Commission on Population and Development. Experts examined long-term trends in food security and nutrition and the observed impacts of COVID-19. They highlighted that COVID-19 was exacerbating existing weaknesses and inequalities in food systems, acting through multiple pathways to affect supply chains, employment and income, access to healthy and nutritious foods, and programme delivery. Dietary shifts were needed to prevent diet-related morbidity and mortality and to keep food systems within planetary boundaries. Systems models of climate and environment were being revised to take account of shocks such as COVID-19. Experts noted that an integrated strategy across supply side, policy and consumer behaviour would be needed to “bend the curve” towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, such as the restoration of biodiversity. Technological innovation and data, including big data, were transforming agricultural globally, but ethical and equity issues with respect to access to technology and ownership of data must be considered, as well as local contexts and the co-creation of innovation. Experts stressed the need to recommend concrete pathways for the transformation of food systems and the importance of both individual and collective behaviours, as well as policy integration at the national level, in order to feed a growing and urbanizing global population healthfully, equitably and sustainably. The findings of the meeting were summarized in a report.¹⁸

C. Support for the General Assembly

52. During the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly, the Division serviced the intergovernmental negotiations on the resolution on international migration and development in the Second Committee. The support included organizing the informal consultations using the WebEx platform, holding small group meetings using Microsoft Teams, consulting with the facilitator, and preparing the compilation text and distributing it through the e-deleGATE portal and the list of participating delegates. As prescribed by the Bureau of the Second Committee, the consultations were limited to negotiating one preambular and one operative paragraph on COVID-19 and providing technical updates.

D. Monitoring of internationally agreed development goals

53. In the context of the 2020 high-level political forum, on 9 July, the Division organized a side event (“lab”) in the context of the voluntary national reviews.¹⁹ The event brought together national policymakers and experts from countries that had recently prepared a voluntary national review, as well as representatives of international organizations and other stakeholders. Participants exchanged knowledge and good practices on the use of population data, including data on migration, for voluntary national reviews and national monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals. The lab facilitated a discussion of recommended action to accelerate the availability, quality and comparability of population and migration data in the coming decade.

¹⁸ See www.un.org/development/desa/pd/events/EGM-on-population-food-security-nutrition-and-sustainable-development.

¹⁹ See www.un.org/development/desa/pd/events/high-level-political-forum-reflecting-population-data-and-migration-trends-vnrs.

54. The survey-based estimates of family planning indicators published in “World contraceptive use 2020”, as well as the model-based estimates and projections of those indicators, Estimates and Projections of Family Planning Indicators 2020, informed the report of the Secretary-General on global progress on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2020,²⁰ in particular with regard to target 3.7 on ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning. The comprehensive data set and model-based estimates and projections provide critical evidence regarding the degree to which the demand for family planning is being met and whether that demand is being satisfied by the use of modern methods of contraception (indicator 3.7.1 of the Goals).

55. As the custodian agency for indicator 3.7.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Division provided updates on the fertility rate for women aged 15–19 years, now available for 223 countries or areas for the period from 2000 to 2018. For 219 of those countries or areas, there are at least two data points available.²¹ In order to also provide information for the younger age group, the Division continues to review available census, survey and administrative data that can be used to estimate the adolescent birth rate at the ages of 10 to 14 years. In support of this effort, the Division has convened an expert group meeting on the evaluation of adolescent fertility data and estimates (see above).

56. The Division prepared training materials, including presentations and videos, on data and methods relating to the monitoring of indicators 3.7.1 and 3.7.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals that are being used in capacity-development activities of UNFPA and the Division. The materials are available online.²²

57. A paper entitled “Monitoring the status of selected health related sustainable development goals: methods and projections to 2030” was prepared in collaboration with WHO, UNICEF and UNAIDS and published in the journal *Global Health Action*. The authors of the paper highlighted common principles and practices of global monitoring of the progress made in achieving the targets of Sustainable Development Goal 3 using seven health indicators as examples. The indicators provided examples of best practice for modelling estimates and projections using standard methods, transparent data collection and country consultations.²³

58. In 2020, the Division collected information for the global monitoring of indicator 10.7.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals through the thirteenth United Nations Inquiry among Governments on Population and Development, which is implemented by the Division in collaboration with IOM and OECD.

59. By means of the same Inquiry, the Division also collected information for the global monitoring of indicator 5.6.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals. These data are gathered collaboratively by the Division with UNFPA, the custodian agency for indicator 5.6.2.

60. During 2020, the Division continued its collaborative work on the estimation of child mortality conducted by the Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation, whose task is to monitor progress made in the achievement of target 3.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals, on ending preventable deaths of newborns and children under 5 years of age, with all countries aiming to reduce neonatal mortality to no more than 12 per 1,000 live births and under-5 mortality to no more than 25 per

²⁰ *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.20.I.7).

²¹ United Nations, Global SDG Indicators database, available at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/database>.

²² See www.un.org/development/desa/pd/data/sdg-indicator-371-contraceptive-use.

²³ Kathleen Strong and others, “Monitoring the status of selected health-related sustainable development goals: methods and projections to 2030”, *Global Health Action*, vol. 13, No. 1 (2020).

1,000 live births. The Inter-Agency Group, led by UNICEF and WHO, also includes the Division and the World Bank. The Division provided information to update the database on infant and under-5 mortality estimates maintained by UNICEF,²⁴ collaborated on the preparation of the report *Levels and Trends in Child Mortality*, published in 2020, and contributed to the compilation and harmonization of several data sets on mortality crises caused by natural disasters and conflicts, and the development of age-sex specific patterns of deaths caused by various types of crises. The data sets will inform the estimation of the impact of mortality crises on the computation of annual life tables as required for *World Population Prospects 2021*.

61. In addition, the Division continued to participate in the Maternal Mortality Estimation Inter-agency Group, which is responsible for monitoring progress on the reduction in maternal mortality, which is target 3.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals, on the reduction in the global maternal mortality to fewer than 70 deaths per 100,000 live births. The Inter-agency Group is led by WHO, with the participation of UNICEF, UNFPA, the World Bank and the Division. The Division provides key input to the maternal mortality estimation process, including country-level estimates of the number of women of reproductive age, the total fertility rate and the number of live births. The Division participated in a series of virtual meetings in preparation for the next round of estimations of maternal mortality ratios, to be released in 2021.

62. Throughout 2020, the Division continued to participate in system-wide consultations and reviews of Sustainable Development Goal indicators under the auspices of the Inter-agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators, including discussions on options for indicators that are not yet clearly defined. In the meeting held in November 2020, the Division made a presentation on a draft final report by the task team of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities on the use of population data for the global monitoring of progress towards the Goals.

XI. Dissemination of population information and data

63. The Population Division continued to strengthen its communications and outreach activities, collaborating closely with the Department of Global Communications and the Strategic Planning and Communications Service of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in launching major publications and in publicizing major intergovernmental events. In line with the strategic communication framework of the Department, the Division further systematized its outreach activities by preparing key messages, media advisories, press releases and social media packages, including digital cards, infographics, tweets and Facebook posts.

64. During 2020, the Division initiated the migration of its website²⁵ to a new Drupal platform. The new website (<https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/>) allows for easier access from mobile devices, reduces the need for posting content on multiple locations, facilitates content management by non-technical staff and integrates the departmental visual ecosystem. The new website, which consolidates various older websites that had been developed in parallel, showcases the main activities and outputs of the Division through easily identifiable sections.²⁶ The migration, which is still under way, involves moving hundreds of publications, meetings and data sets to the new website location.

²⁴ Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation, Stillbirth and Child Mortality Estimates database, available at <http://childmortality.org>.

²⁵ The old website location was www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/index.asp.

²⁶ The main sections include: CPD, Themes, Events, Publications, Data and SDGs.

65. According to information obtained through Google Analytics, the websites maintained by the Division²⁷ had nearly 4.5 million page views in 2020, an increase of 3 per cent compared with 2019. Several Division publications, including *World Population Prospects 2019: Highlights*, *World Urbanization Prospects 2018: Highlights* and *International Migration 2019*, continued to rank among the most accessed publications in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs according to departmental download statistics. The outputs presenting the findings of the 2019 revision of *World Population Prospects*, including reports, data files in Excel and ASCII formats, an interactive database, figures and maps, as well as other supporting materials,²⁸ remained widely consulted in 2020.

66. Several agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system distribute data produced by the Division through their databases and websites. For example, the Division contributes to more than 80 of the 1,600 indicators in the World Development Indicators database of the World Bank, with a focus on population dynamics and population structures, fertility, contraception, mortality, migration and urbanization. The indicators were downloaded by up to 600,000 visitors in 2020, and five of them were among the top 10 most downloaded data.

67. The Division created launch packages for the releases of *Highlights* reports. The launch of *World Family Planning 2020: Highlights – Accelerating Action to Ensure Universal Access to Family Planning* included 10 key messages and social media infographics (September 2020).²⁹ The launch of *World Population Ageing 2020: Highlights – Living Arrangements of Older Persons* included 10 key messages and a population factsheet (October).³⁰ The launch package for *International Migration 2020: Highlights* included a report, a revised set of estimates of the number of international migrants, documentation, 10 key messages, a media kit and a social media package (January 2021).³¹ To improve dissemination, since 2018, all divisional publications and data sets have been issued under a Creative Commons licence.

68. The Division collaborated with UNICEF as co-editors of the report *How COVID-19 is Changing the World: A Statistical Perspective (Volume II)*, issued under the auspices of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities. The report provided the most recent data available to map the economic, social, regional and statistical dimensions of the impact of COVID-19. The report updated and expanded on global, regional and thematic trends identified in the first volume, which was released in May 2020.

69. The Division engaged in outreach activities in support of the commemoration of international days, in close collaboration with partner entities. In particular, it produced relevant materials in the context of World Contraception Day (26 September), the International Day of Older Persons (1 October) and International Migrants Day (18 December).

70. Staff members of the Division participated in meetings of professional associations in the field of population, which provided a platform for the dissemination of the Division's work in academic circles. In 2020, staff gave presentations at, among others, the annual meeting of the Population Association of America, held virtually on 23 and 24 April, during which the Division also organized a session on population, food security, nutrition and sustainable development.

²⁷ See www.un.org/development/desa/pd/, <https://population.un.org/wpp/> and <https://population.un.org/wup/>.

²⁸ See <https://population.un.org/wpp/>.

²⁹ See www.un.org/development/desa/pd/news/world-family-planning-2020-highlights.

³⁰ See www.un.org/development/desa/pd/news/world-population-ageing-2020-highlights.

³¹ See <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/news/international-migration-2020>.

71. The Division received many requests for data and provided such information in a timely manner. In 2020, it continued to meet with delegations of Member States to discuss various population-related topics, including the Division's estimates of and projections for the global population, the work of the Commission on Population and Development, the follow-up to and review of the 2030 Agenda and the work of the United Nations in the area of migration. It also provided briefing notes and statements for senior officials of the United Nations.

XII. Technical cooperation

72. At the request of the national statistical office of Georgia, the Population Division provided technical assistance on national and subnational population estimates and projections. Georgia completed its most recent census in 2014. The office had sought to develop national and subnational population projections through 2070. The Division advised on the methodological and technical issues confronted in producing those projections.

73. At the request of the general statistical office of Viet Nam, the Division provided technical assistance on population estimates and projections. Viet Nam had completed its most recent census in 2019. The office had sought to develop 30-year population projections for the period 2019–2049 for the nation, 6 regions and 63 provinces. The Division advised on methodological and technical issues confronted in producing those projections.

74. The Division held online workshops on 6 and 7 August 2020 with participants from 34 countries in conjunction with the thirteenth Annual Global Conference on Population and the Generational Economy. The discussions focused on key population and development issues that could be uniquely addressed using National Transfer Accounts estimates and methods. Follow-up workshops will be held on the preparation of national reports on the generational economy to examine the economic and fiscal implications of population change using data from National Transfer Accounts.

Annex

Publications, expert group meetings and other materials prepared or events organized by the Population Division (1 January–31 December 2020)

Expert group meetings

Expert group meeting on methods for *World Population Prospects 2021* and beyond, virtual meeting, New York, 6–8 April 2020

Expert group meeting on the evaluation of adolescent fertility data and estimates, virtual meeting, New York, 26 and 27 October 2020

Expert group meeting on population, food security, nutrition and sustainable development, New York, 28–30 October 2020

Capacity development workshops

Online workshops on the generational economy, 6 and 7 August 2020

Reports of the Secretary-General and other parliamentary documents

Report of the Secretary-General on population, food security, nutrition and sustainable development ([E/CN.9/2020/2](#))

Report of the Secretary-General on world demographic trends ([E/CN.9/2020/5](#))

Report of the Secretary-General on programme implementation and progress of work in the field of population in 2019: Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs ([E/CN.9/2020/6](#))

Report of the Secretary-General on international migration and development ([A/75/292](#))

Research studies

“Fertility among young adolescents at ages 10–14 years: a global assessment” ([ST/ESA/SER.A/453](#))

International Migration 2020: Highlights ([ST/ESA/SER.A/452](#))

World Family Planning 2020: Highlights – Accelerating Action to Ensure Universal Access to Family Planning ([ST/ESA/SER.A/450](#))

World Fertility Report 2019: Early and Later Childbearing among Adolescent Women ([ST/ESA/SER.A/446](#))

World Mortality 2019 ([ST/ESA/SER.A/437](#))

World Population Ageing 2020: Highlights – Living Arrangements of Older Persons ([ST/ESA/SER.A/451](#))

World Population Policies 2019 ([ST/ESA/SER.A/442](#))

World Population Policies 2019: Highlights ([ST/ESA/SER.A/443](#))

Databases and data sets

World Contraceptive Use 2020

Estimates and Projections of Family Planning Indicators 2020

International Migrant Stock 2020

Technical papers series

“Data and methods for the production of national population estimates: An overview and analysis of available metadata” (Technical Paper, No. 2020/01)

“Census counts, undercounts and population estimates: The importance of data quality evaluation” (Technical Paper, No. 2020/02)

“Measuring household and living arrangements of older persons around the world: the United Nations database on the households and living arrangements of older persons 2019” (Technical Paper, No. 2020/03)

Policy briefs

“Government policies to address population ageing” (Population Facts, No. 2020/1)

“Policies on spatial distribution and urbanization have broad impacts on sustainable development” (Population Facts, No. 2020/2)

“International Migration 2020: Highlights – Ten key messages”

“World Family Planning 2020: Highlights – Ten key messages”

“World Population Ageing 2020: Highlights – Ten key messages”
