

Istanbul, 13 November 2009

Conclusions of the ICPD/15 Regional Forum
and
Key Strategic Actions to Further Accelerate the Implementation
of the ICPD Programme of Action in Europe and Central Asia

The ICPD/15 Regional Forum brought together more than 200 participants from 36 countries, including Ministers and other high level Government officials, Members of Parliament, representatives of international, non-governmental and faith-based organizations, youth networks, as well as independent experts, who deliberated for two days, taking stock of what has been accomplished, identifying gaps and challenges, drawing lessons, and developing practical recommendations for accelerating the progress in implementing the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) *Programme of Action* (PoA) for the following 5 years and beyond.

The Forum was co-organized by, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the European Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development (EPF), the International Planned Parenthood Federation European Network (IPPF), and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and was hosted by the Government of Turkey. It was preceded by a High-Level Meeting on Maternal Health (MDG 5).

CURRENT STATUS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ICPD AGENDA IN THE EUROPEAN REGION

The participants in the Forum highlighted the successes achieved over the past 15 years in implementing the ICPD/PoA. These include, *inter alia*, an overall decrease in maternal mortality and abortion rates in Eastern Europe; increased access to antenatal care and skilled birth attendance; improved access to family planning and reproductive health information and services, including for youth, and the provision of sexual and reproductive health education in non-formal settings; introduction of evidence based standards and protocols on maternal care and family planning; increased knowledge of young people on HIV and STIs prevention and giving young people a voice on matters that concern them; enhanced capacity of the civil sector working in the area of youth sexual and reproductive health and HIV/AIDS; better compliance of the national systems for population statistics in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA) countries with international standards; increased attention to emerging population issues in

policy formulation; the strengthening of a broad conducive legal and policy environment, including on young people, on gender based violence, etc.

There are areas where progress has been insufficient, notwithstanding the efforts: maternal mortality still remains high particularly in Central Asia and some countries in Eastern Europe; the region still has the highest abortion rates in the world as women continue to use abortion as a means to control fertility; the sexual and reproductive health and HIV prevention programs are not sufficiently integrated; countries in the region still face inadequate access to and quality of reproductive health services, including commodity security, especially among vulnerable populations.

Despite the fact that all countries in the European region and Central Asia have signed international instruments on gender equality, including the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) which was ratified by the vast majority, challenges in ensuring gender equality and the empowerment of women remain. These include lack of appropriate policies, financial means and monitoring mechanisms, as well as procedures to ensure gender equality and prevention of gender based violence, and lack of rules and systems for coordinated response in cases of violence against women.

While progress has been made in the provision of age appropriate, gender-sensitive and comprehensive sexuality and reproductive health education, information, and services for young people, more efforts are needed to address needs of most at risk youth to reduce risk of HIV/AIDS, STIs, unsafe abortion and early pregnancy. In addition, further progress is needed to address the structural nature of youth unemployment and to promote job creation.

It is widely acknowledged that funding for reproductive health is not at the levels necessary to provide adequate access to family planning and maternal and newborn health services, even though it is recognized that investing in the health and rights of women and young people is a smart way to build a better world. While funding for most areas of health has increased significantly over the past 15 years that for sexual and reproductive health remains relatively unchanged.

NEW TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

The *Forum* reaffirmed the commitment to ICPD, its principles, and its *Programme of Action* as a visionary and holistic document. It has been internationally recognized that implementing the *Programme of Action* is essential to the achievement of the *Millennium Development Goals*

(13 November 2009)

(MDGs). At the same time, participants emphasized that over the past 15 years the world and the European region have experienced dramatic political, social, economic, and demographic changes, which require innovative thinking and concerted action. These include:

- the current global crisis, which affects the abilities of governments to pursue social policies, brings changes in reproductive and other demographically significant behaviours, and alters the pull and push factors of migration;
- climate change, which necessitates the development of national policies, strategies and plans addressing both the mitigation and adaptation approach to climate change, and accounting for population dynamics and health impacts, particularly on women and vulnerable populations;
- the changes in reproductive behaviour in the European region, e.g. postponement of childbearing, the weakening link between marriage and procreation, the increasing childlessness, which result in low fertility and the prospect of population decrease;
- the combination of natural population decrease and significant emigration in many countries of the EECA region, which is without parallel in world population history and precipitates the shrinkage of the population;
- the intensified migration flows, which create challenges, but also opportunities for both countries of origin and destination; women's and young people's mobility is particularly significant and poses both benefits and vulnerabilities;
- the increasing evidence that gender equality contributes to higher fertility in the current European context, which underlines the importance of efforts to ensure gender equality, and to consider the gender implication of pro-natalist measures
- population ageing, which is precipitated by the low fertility and underscores the need to ensure sustainability of social protection systems, and to address the special needs of older persons, in particular older women and other vulnerable groups.
- the dramatic decline of mortality among older persons in Western countries, which challenges traditional notions about human life span and affects intergenerational relations.
- in contrast, the adverse trends in mortality and morbidity persisting in some Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries, which highlight the health inequalities in the region;

- increase of new infections of HIV/AIDS in some countries, which requires enhanced efforts for prevention, treatment, care and support.

KEY STRATEGIC ACTIONS TO FURTHER ACCELERATE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ICPD/PoA IN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

Participants identified the following key strategic actions for accelerating the implementation of ICPD/PoA in Europe and Central Asia:

Governments should accelerate efforts to achieve universal access to reproductive health and reduce maternal mortality, by

- prioritizing universal access to quality reproductive health services including of reproductive organs cancers, in national policies, development plans, and budgets;
- ensuring that programmes on sexual and reproductive health and HIV/AIDS prevention are better integrated and that access to voluntary family planning is ensured for persons living with HIV/AIDS;
- taking measures against stigma and discrimination towards people living with HIV/AIDS;
- implementing the outcomes of the global and regional meetings on maternal health-Millennium Development Goal 5;
- supporting and promoting sexual and reproductive health education and health seeking behavior, in particular among vulnerable groups;
- ensuring adequate domestic and donor resources for reproductive health and developing innovative funding mechanisms to provide access to reproductive health services for the poor and for people without health insurance, and integrating ICPD objectives and MDGs with the broader regional initiatives, such as the Eastern Partnership.

Governments should harness the opportunities of demographic change and address the challenges that arise from it, by

- putting in place policies that contribute to having healthier, better educated current and future generations, promote gender equality and responsible parenthood, and respect all rights and freedoms;
- using the opportunities that demographic change opens for poverty reduction and achieving MDG1, including by putting in place an enabling policy and institutional environment so that countries could benefit from the 'demographic window of opportunity';

(13 November 2009)

- review and adjust social policies so as to address the vulnerabilities caused by ageing, migration, population and environment interdependences;
- strengthening the analytical, research and institutional capacities on population and further promoting policy-relevant data collection efforts, and strengthening the capacities of the statistical systems;

Governments should accelerate efforts to ensure gender equality and empowerment of women and girls a reality and eliminate gender based violence, by:

- continuously strengthening policies and improving accountability and oversight mechanisms, to ensure the full realization of sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights for all;
- supporting advocacy programmes engaging men and boys to promote positive behavioral change and perceptions of the empowerment of women and girls, and the achievement of equity and gender equality within society;
- strongly condemning persistent acts of violence against women and girls, in particular working with parliamentarians and the judiciary, to end impunity for acts of violence against women;
- ensuring adequate and comprehensive support and protection of victims and taking action to rehabilitate perpetrators;
- raising national awareness against gender-based violence as a human right issue and strengthening local networks on gender-based violence through various forms of media, faith-based organizations and non-government organizations;
- ensuring research and data collection on the prevalence, causes, and consequences of all forms of violence against women, as well as on the effectiveness of measures implemented to prevent and address violence against women;
- working closely with partners in communities, including religious leaders and faith-based organizations in combating gender based violence.

Governments should strengthen efforts to empower young people, by:

- allocating adequate resources for their education and life-skills development; ensuring adequate employment opportunities; and putting in place mechanisms to ensure effective youth participation in the socio-political processes, to influence, implement, monitor and evaluate policies that affect their interests;
- providing access to sexual and reproductive health services for young people, recognizing the diversity and providing age-appropriate and gender-sensitive comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education and information;

ICPD/15 Regional Forum: Conclusions

- preventing all types of exploitation and abuse against young people, including human trafficking, and economic, sexual, physical and mental abuse, creating a socio-economic and legal environment conducive to the elimination of child marriages and the elimination of discrimination against young pregnant girls;
- supporting and monitoring inter-sectoral investments in youth development, with particular emphasis on marginalized adolescents, seeking to improve their quality of life, their decision making capacity and their contribution to sustainable development.

Participants called upon Governments, Parliaments, International Organizations, Non-Governmental Organizations, Faith-Based Organizations, youth networks, civil society, private sector as well as other stakeholders to ensure that the above actions are taken and the implementation of ICPD/PoA is accelerated, and the ICPD goals and the MDGs are achieved in the region.