



The sixth regional review of the International Conference on Population and Development in the Arab region

Arab Regional Conference on Population and Development: Challenges and Prospects Ten Years after the 2013 Cairo Declaration

Beirut, 13–14 September 2023

Concept note

I. Background information

The 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) marked a global consensus among 179 Governments on putting population issues, human rights and dignity at the heart of sustainable development. [The Programme of Action](#) of the ICPD redirected the international discourse on population and development, from a focus on achieving certain demographic goals towards a greater emphasis on the welfare of the population and on people's individual rights and choices as prerequisites for achieving sustainable development.

The Programme of Action defined a set of goals and objectives covering a wide range of issues related to population and sustainable development, including education; poverty; gender equality, equity and women's empowerment; mortality, morbidity and health, including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights; and population distribution, urbanization and migration. It also addressed the specific needs of different population groups and the challenges they face in the context of demographic transitions, environmental changes and emerging social and economic developments.

Five years later, the United Nations General Assembly adopted key actions to accelerate the implementation of the ICPD goals and provided a set of benchmarks for achieving them.¹ In 2011, the Programme of Action validity was extended beyond 2014 to ensure that all countries meet the agreed goals, urging the international community to “undertake reviews of the progress achieved

1 United Nations General Assembly resolution [A/RES/S-21/2](#).

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*and the constraints faced therein in the implementation of the Programme of Action at all levels”.*² The periodic ICPD reviews undertaken in the past 25 years have demonstrated that the agreed goals remain valid despite the significant global progress achieved in several areas.

In the Arab region, regional reviews of the implementation of the Programme of Action revealed significant improvements in reducing infant, child and maternal mortality rates, increasing access to sexual and reproductive health services, including family planning, enhancing school enrolment rates, promoting gender equality in education and improving access to safe drinking water, among other goals. However, this progress has been partial and uneven among and within countries with persistent challenges, such as youth development, quality education, women's and girls' empowerment, rural development, gender-based violence and harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation. In addition, new challenges and changes have emerged, including a transition in the demographic structure, increased rates of migration and urbanization, climate change, and rising social and economic inequalities.

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the United Nations Population Fund-Arab States Regional Office (UNFPA-ASRO) and the League of Arab States (LAS) led the fourth review process of the ICPD Programme of Action in the Arab region, in collaboration with the Economic Commission for Africa. The process culminated in a regional ministerial conference on 24–26 June 2013, under the theme “Development Challenges and Population Dynamics in a Changing Arab World”. The conference resulted in the adoption of the [2013 Cairo Declaration](#), a statement that renewed the commitment of Arab countries to the Programme of Action as an unfinished agenda on population and development, to guide Arab countries' efforts beyond 2014. It highlighted several priority areas for the Arab region, including dignity and equality, gender equality and women's empowerment, youth, sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, international migration, internal displacement and large refugee movements, and environmental sustainability. Arab countries also stressed the importance of data and research for monitoring population change and its impact on development and strengthening participation and partnerships.

In 2018, the three leading entities convened the [Arab Regional Conference on Population and Development: Five Years after the 2013 Cairo Declaration](#). Informed by voluntary national review reports and a regional synthesis report, Arab delegations agreed that despite positive strides across various socioeconomic indicators, development gains did not reach everyone and numerous challenges still threatened the region's ability to achieve sustainable development. Participants also acknowledged the interlinkages and synergies between the 2013 Cairo Declaration and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) and agreed to ensure the optimal investment of the efforts and resources of Arab countries and identify means to monitor the population dimension in implementing the 2030 Agenda.

II. The regional review process of the 2013 Cairo Declaration

Against this backdrop and given that the 2013 Cairo Declaration is the government-negotiated roadmap for achieving the ICPD objectives in the Arab region, ESCWA, UNFPA-ASRO and LAS are

² United Nations General Assembly resolution [A/RES/65/234](#).

co-leading its ten-year review, as part of the sixth review and appraisal of the ICPD Programme of Action. The review process has included the following stages:

- Beginning in October 2022, Arab countries have designated national focal points to lead the coordination and preparation of the ICPD voluntary national review reports.
- To support the Arab countries' representatives in the national reporting process, ESCWA, UNFPA and LAS prepared a guiding template in line with the structure and narrative of the 2013 Cairo Declaration.
- ESCWA, UNFPA and LAS also organized two capacity-building workshops for national focal points. The [first workshop](#), held in October 2022, aimed to discuss the regional review methodology and build consensus on the guiding template while the [second workshop](#), held in February 2023, aimed to identify the progress made and challenges faced in the process of collecting information.
- ESCWA, UNFPA and LAS also organized a series of consultative dialogues in May and June 2023. The [first dialogue](#), held online with Arab parliamentarians on 11 May 2023, was followed by another [virtual dialogue](#) on 1 June 2023 with various non-governmental stakeholders, including from national and regional civil society organizations, youth, women's organizations, academia and the private sector. Finally, a third dialogue was organized with youth from different Arab countries in Tunis, on 22–23 June 2023, to ensure optimal participation of youth groups in the review process. The second and third dialogues were organized in partnership with the International Planned Parenthood Federation - Arab World Region (IPPF).
- The review process will culminate in a regional review conference, which will be held in Beirut on 13 and 14 September 2023 to present the findings of the regional review report and key messages from the three consultations.

III. Arab Regional Conference on Population and Development: Challenges and Prospects Ten Years after the 2013 Cairo Declaration

ESCWA, the UNFPA-ASRO and the LAS, in partnership with the IPPF, are organizing the Arab Regional Conference on Population and Development: Challenges and Prospects Ten Years after the 2013 Cairo Declaration on 13–14 September 2023.

A. Objectives

The regional review process will culminate in a high-level multi-stakeholder conference that aims to:

1. Provide a common platform for collective reflections and discussions between Arab countries and all relevant stakeholders, and for an exchange of lessons learned.
2. Enable Arab Governments to undertake an assessment of the progress made and challenges faced in implementing the commitments made in the 2013 Cairo Declaration.
3. Explore possible policy solutions to accelerate the implementation of the 2013 Cairo Declaration.
4. Offer an opportunity to present the key findings of the regional review report on progress made in implementing the 2013 Cairo Declaration, which synthesizes the data and information provided by the national review reports.



B. Participants

In the spirit of the ICPD Programme of Action and a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to the follow-up and review process, the Conference will bring together representatives of governmental institutions, including ministers and high-level officials from relevant ministries and national population councils, in addition to parliamentarians, representatives of civil society organizations, including women-led and youth groups, international and regional organizations, diplomatic missions, United Nations agencies, academics, experts and representatives from the private sector and donor agencies.

C. Programme

The programme of the two-day Conference is divided into three parts:

1. The 2013 Cairo Declaration: assessing progress and challenges in the Arab region

To set the scene for the Arab Regional Conference on Population and Development: Ten Years after the 2013 Cairo Declaration, the organizers will present an overview of the ICPD regional review process and share key demographic trends and prospects in the Arab region as well as common trends and challenges, as identified in the regional review report of the 2013 Cairo Declaration.

The Conference will also provide a space for peer learning and national ownership of the regional review of the 2013 Cairo Declaration. The countries that prepared ICPD voluntary review reports will be invited to present key messages from their review, highlighting opportunities, success stories, challenges faced and lessons learned. A plenary special session will offer an opportunity for different stakeholders to present the outcomes of their regional consultations on the ten-year review of the 2013 Cairo Declaration in the Arab region. A rapporteur from each consultation group will deliver the key messages. Finally, a high-level plenary session will provide an open platform for senior policymakers to reflect on some of their countries' experiences in developing population policies and integrating population priorities in development planning.

2. Regional population and development priorities and prospects, "ten years after the 2013 Cairo Declaration"

In the second part of the Conference, four thematic plenary sessions will focus on key priority areas for population and development in the region, in line with the 2013 Cairo Declaration. These sessions will tackle select development issues, such as poverty and inequality, health including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, gender equality, social inclusion, environmental sustainability and humanitarian crises. Each session will identify key challenges under all focus areas and come up with possible solutions. A final plenary session will discuss the enabling environment and means to accelerate progress toward achieving the ICPD promise in the Arab region with a focus on technology, data and partnerships. The thematic sessions will bring together panellists representing different stakeholders, including governments, civil society organizations, experts and the private sector.





3. Ten years after Cairo Declaration 2013: key messages and outcome of the regional review

The concluding session will present the key messages and recommendations that emanated from the Conference presentations, discussions and consultations.

D. Conference outcomes

The Conference will result in an outcome document highlighting the key messages voiced by Arab governments and other stakeholders during the Conference sessions and the outcomes of the three consultations held in May and June 2023. The outcome document will provide region-specific guidance and a roadmap for accelerating the delivery of commitments made in the 2013 Cairo Declaration and will feed, together with the regional review report, into the report of the United Nations Secretary-General on "programmes and interventions assessing the status of implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and its contribution to the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development during the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development".³

E. Date, venue and working languages

The regional review conference will be held in a hybrid format at the United Nations House in Beirut, from 13 to 14 September 2023, with simultaneous interpretation available from and into Arabic, English and French.

³ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Commission on Population and Development, fifty-seventh session, 2024. Available at <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/events/CPD57>.

