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Draft terms of reference:

HLCP Task Team on Demographic Change

(Prepared by the HLCP Task Team on Demographic Change)

This document outlines the terms of reference for the High-Level Committee on Programmes (HLCP) Task Team on Demographic Change, for HLCP's approval. The Task Team, co-chaired by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), will focus on strengthening system-wide understanding, coherence and coordination in addressing demographic change and its implications for sustainable development.

I. Context and background

A. The demographic landscape of many countries is changing rapidly

1. Global demographic trends underpin significant transformations that profoundly impact sustainable development. Three such demographic megatrends that are impacting people and societies across the globe are of special relevance to the UN system:
 - **Population growth and decline:** Although the world's population continues to grow, with an expected addition of two billion people over the next 50-60 years, population growth rates vary significantly across regions and countries. Some nations are experiencing rapid growth, while others are facing population decline. By 2054, the population is projected to double in 9 countries, while in 63 countries, the population size peaked before 2024 and is expected to decline further. Currently, one in four people live in a country where the population has already peaked. These shifts have implications for promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth, gender equality and women's empowerment, and may also affect access to resources and social services.
 - **Population ageing:** The global number of persons aged 65 or higher is projected to double over the next 30 years. And while many countries still have relatively large youth populations, including most populations in sub-Saharan Africa, ageing is a reality in all countries, often most pronounced in rural areas. Population ageing poses challenges to social security systems, healthcare, care systems and labour markets, with crucial gender dimensions. For instance, an older woman is twice as likely to live alone and significantly more likely to lack access to adequate pension income or social protection. At the same time, population ageing presents opportunities for leveraging the experience and contributions that older people make to their families, their local communities and society more broadly.
 - **International migration:** The number of international migrants has doubled in the past 30 years, reaching 304 million in 2024. Although migrants constitute a small share of the global population (less than 4 per cent), their contribution for inclusive growth and sustainable development is substantial in countries of origin, transit and destination. Facilitating safe, orderly and regular migration, while reducing the incidence and negative impacts of irregular migration and ensuring the respect, protection and fulfilment of the human rights of migrants is critical.

B. Limited insights into global demographic trends can risk shaping narratives and policies that fall short of addressing actual needs

2. Because the implications of these trends are not yet fully understood, anxiety about demographic change is apparent in a growing number of countries—both the longstanding concerns about rapid population growth and more recent concerns about population ageing and decline. In these contexts, narrow or negative framings risk reinforcing ageism and reversing decades of progress in women's empowerment, particularly regarding sexual and reproductive health and rights and economic participation. At the same time, misinformation and a lack of understanding about the benefits and challenges of international migration and of the demographic, economic, social and environmental changes that have implications for and result from migration has contributed to a proliferation of false and misleading narratives. Promotion of an evidence- and rights-based discourse on ways to anticipate and adapt to these ongoing demographic changes would enable

polymakers to increasingly integrate such considerations into planning processes and policy considerations and improve the effectiveness of responses to foster positive social and economic development.

3. While effective collaboration on some aspects of demographic change is well established already within the UN system, conversations about issues such as ageing, youth, migration, sexual and reproductive health, and gender equality, as well as relevant intersections, are often disconnected rather than integrated in the context of changing demographics. This leads to a lack of visibility and understanding of the importance of demographic change for development policies within the UN and limits the system's effectiveness in providing coordinated support to Member States in policy development and planning. are often disconnected rather than integrated in the context of changing demographics. This leads to a lack of visibility and understanding of the importance of demographic change for development policies within the UN and limits the system's effectiveness in providing coordinated support to Member States in policy development and planning.
4. The HLCP plays a pivotal role in ensuring system-wide coordination and policy coherence. The Task Team's work will contribute directly to HLCP's mandate by fostering inter-agency dialogue on demographic change and responses and providing practical guidance. The Task Team will leverage expertise from the different HLCP members, who bring unique perspectives to the table. A collaborative approach will facilitate knowledge sharing and enable the development of innovative policy responses and solutions.

II. Objectives

5. The overarching objectives of this time-bound HLCP Task Team are to (1) promote balanced and informed narratives about the implications of demographic change, (2) promote system-wide coherence around policy responses to demographic change, to improve the coordination of programmatic support provided to Member States, and (3) promote the effective integration of demographic trends in processes intended to advance sustainable development by 2030 and beyond.
6. A common system-wide approach will promote several outcomes:
 - **Common messages to inform balanced narratives and effective policy responses:** Common messaging will allow the UN system to speak with one voice, grounded in evidence and system-wide experience, about both the opportunities and challenges of demographic trends.
 - **Enhanced policy coherence:** Demographic change is interconnected with various development issues, including health, education, decent work, social protection, gender equality, digital inclusion and economic growth, as well as environmental factors and climate change. A coherent approach across the UN system will ensure that these linkages are well understood and taken into account when formulating policies both to respond to demographic change and to promote sustainable development, including the role of international migration as a solution, not just a challenge.
 - **Coordinated assistance:** Member States require comprehensive and consistent support to navigate the causes and consequences of demographic change. A coordinated approach, across and within UN entities at global, regional and national levels, will prevent duplication of efforts and ensure that countries receive tailored assistance that responds to their specific needs.

III. Outputs and timeline

7. The Task Team will adopt a phased approach to deliver tangible outputs over a two-year period.
 - A. **Phase 1: June 2025—April 2026**
8. The work of the Task Team will initially focus on promoting policy coherence, developing a common position on policy responses to demographic change and strengthening and amplifying messages on demographic

change within the UN and towards governments and the general public. Key outputs for the first year will include:

- **Mapping of policy frameworks, instruments and coordination mechanisms:** Conduct a rapid review of relevant substantive work developed under existing inter-governmental frameworks and inter-agency initiatives related to demographic change—most notably, networks and working groups on demographic data and estimates, youth, ageing, gender equality and international migration—summarizing key policy recommendations and identifying existing gaps. The review will include relevant reports, data (disaggregated by relevant dimensions) or platforms produced by Task Team member entities, as appropriate. The main findings of the mapping will be presented to the HLCP at its 50th session (2-3 October 2025).
- **Common messaging:** Develop an initial set of topline/high-level common messages to address anxieties arising from demographic change and the impact of such change on sustainable development and human rights in current public and political debates. The messages will be evidence- and rights-based, and provide a balanced approach that highlights challenges, opportunities and solutions. The document will be submitted for review and approval to the HLCP at its 50th session (2-3 October 2025). The common messaging will be shared, as appropriate, at co-sponsored sessions and other initiatives convened by interested members of the Task Team, possibly including at the Second World Summit for Social Development (Qatar, 4-6 November 2025), at the Commission for Social Development, and at the Commission on Population and Development in 2026.
- **Proposal for system-wide approach:** Further develop the initial common messages to produce a paper featuring a set of guiding principles and policy recommendations for the United Nations system in support of Member States and other stakeholders. The recommendations would be aligned with intergovernmental processes and United Nations norms and standards and aimed at promoting a common understanding of strategic responses to demographic realities based on evidence and foresight, and grounded in principles of human rights and non-discrimination, gender equality, age sensitivity, social inclusion and intergenerational solidarity. The paper will propose a common system-wide approach to demographic change and will be submitted for review and approval by the HLCP at its 51st session (Spring 2026).

B. Phase 2: May 2026—April 2027

9. Building on the outputs of the first phase, and bearing in mind the available resources, capacities and priorities, the Task Team will develop, for HLCP's consideration, a plan of activities for the second year that will focus on more programmatic and operational deliverables. Indicative products for phase 2 might include:
 - **Finalization of system-wide approach** to demographic change, as outlined above
 - **Guidelines for integrating demographic change in UN's strategic foresight, analysis and long-term planning:** Such an output could also inform/contribute to the preparations for the five-year review of the implementation of the Declaration on Future Generations (UNGA 83 in 2028).
 - **Guidelines for country support:** Operationalizing the system-wide approach, develop and disseminate practical guidelines for UN country teams and regional mechanisms on integrating demographic change into national development strategies in collaboration with the UN Sustainable Development Group.
 - **Report on impacts of demographic change on sustainable development beyond 2030:** Such a report could provide evidence supporting the inclusion of demographic change in national development strategies, sectoral development plans, macroeconomic reviews, and public budgets and in the post-2030 development agenda.

- **Advocacy and communication strategy based on the common messages.**

IV. Membership and working methods

10. The Task Team is co-chaired by UNFPA and DESA and is open to all HLCP member entities. Each entity is invited to appoint primary and secondary focal points, who will regularly and actively participate in exchanges and meetings and contribute to the delivery of outputs.
11. As a priority, the Task Team will seek to leverage existing coordination mechanisms and networks, including relevant inter-agency working groups, and to benefit from their work and insights. Within the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the work will align with existing frameworks such as the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, adopted in 1994, and the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing adopted at the Second World Assembly on Ageing in 2002, which provide solid normative foundations for addressing demographic change within a human rights framework. The Task Team will also leverage other relevant global platforms and agreements (e.g., the Commission on Population and Development, the Commission for Social Development, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030) and the Pact for the Future) to guide its work.
12. Moreover, the Task Team may engage actively with relevant stakeholders, including from academia, the private sector and civil society. UNFPA and DESA, in consultation with other members of the Task Team, may convene meetings of experts to provide inputs that can inform and guide the work of the Task Team.
13. The work of the Task Team is time-bound and envisaged to conclude upon submission of agreed outputs. The establishment of a standing coordination mechanism, communities of practice, peer-to-peer exchanges, advisory support to normative processes, or other platforms may be proposed as part of the Task Team's final recommendations to HLCP, if deemed useful.