

Annex III

Terms of reference for the task team on demographic change of the High-level Committee on Programmes

I. Context and background

A. The demographic landscape of many countries is changing rapidly

1. Global demographic trends underpin significant transformations that profoundly affect sustainable development. Three such demographic megatrends that are affecting people and societies across the globe are of special relevance to the United Nations system:

- **Population growth and decline.** Although the world's population continues to grow, with an expected addition of 2 billion people over the next 50–60 years, rates of population growth 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 peaked before 2024 and is expected to continue to decline. Currently, one in every four people lives in a country where the population has already peaked. These shifts have implications for 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 older is projected to double over the next 30 years. While many countries, including most countries in sub-Saharan Africa, still have relatively large youth populations, ageing is a reality in all countries, and is 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 as an older man 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 to inclusive growth and sustainable development in origin, transit and destination countries is substantial. It is critical to facilitate safe, orderly and regular migration; reduce the incidence and negative impacts of irregular migration; and ensure respect for, and protection and fulfilment of, migrants' human rights.

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

2. Because the implications of global demographic trends are not yet fully understood, anxiety about demographic change is apparent in a growing number of countries – this includes both long-standing concerns about rapid population growth and more recent concerns about population ageing and decline. Narrow or negative framing of demographic trends risks reinforcing ageism and reversing decades of progress in women's empowerment, particularly with regard to sexual and reproductive health and rights, and economic participation. At the same time,

misinformation and a lack of understanding of the benefits and challenges of international migration – and of the demographic, economic, social and environmental changes that have implications for, and result from, migration – have contributed to a proliferation of false and misleading narratives. The promotion of an evidence- and rights-based discourse on how to anticipate and adapt to these ongoing demographic changes would enable policymakers to increasingly integrate such considerations into planning processes and policies, with a view to more effectively fostering positive social and economic development.

3. While effective collaboration on some aspects of demographic change is already well established within the United Nations system, conversations about issues such as ageing, youth, migration, sexual and reproductive health and gender equality, as well as relevant intersections, are often disconnected from, rather than integrated into, the context of changing demographics. This leads to a lack of visibility and understanding, within the United Nations, of the importance of demographic change for development policies, thus limiting the system's ability to provide effective, coordinated policy development and planning support to Member States.

4. The High-level Committee on Programmes (HLCP) plays a pivotal role in ensuring system-wide coordination and policy coherence. The task team will contribute directly to the fulfilment of the mandate of HLCP by fostering inter-agency dialogue and providing practical guidance on demographic change and responses to it. The task team will leverage the expertise of 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 the time-bound task team are: (a) to promote balanced and informed narratives about the implications of demographic change, (b) to promote system-wide coherence with respect to policy responses to demographic change in order to improve the coordination of the programmatic support provided to Member States and (c) to promote the effective integration of demographic trends into processes intended to advance sustainable development in the period up to 2030 and beyond.

6. A system-wide approach will promote several outcomes:

- **Common messages to inform balanced narratives and effective policy responses.** Common messaging will allow the United Nations system to speak with one voice, grounded in evidence and system-wide experience, about both the opportunities and challenges generated by demographic trends.
- **Enhanced policy coherence.** Demographic change is connected to various development issues, including issues of health, education, decent work, social protection, gender equality, digital inclusion and economic growth; it is also linked to environmental factors and climate change. A coherent approach across the United Nations system will ensure that these linkages are well understood and are taken into account in the formulation of policies aimed at both responding to demographic change and at promoting sustainable development, including by fostering recognition of 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 United Nations entities, at the 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 task team will initially focus on promoting policy coherence, including by developing a common position on policy responses to demographic change and by strengthening and amplifying messages on demographic change. It will focus on messaging within the United Nations, as well as messages targeting Governments and the general public. Key outputs for the first year will include:

- **Mapping of policy frameworks, instruments and coordination mechanisms.** The task team will conduct a rapid review of relevant substantive work carried out under existing intergovernmental frameworks and inter-agency initiatives related to demographic change (notably, networks and working groups focused on demographic data and estimates, youth, ageing, gender equality or international migration). The task team will then summarize key policy recommendations and identify gaps. The review will serve to identify relevant reports, data (disaggregated by relevant dimensions) or platforms produced by Task Team member entities. The main findings of the mapping will be presented to HLCP at its fiftieth session.
- **Common messaging.** The task team will develop an initial set of high-level common messages aimed at addressing anxiety about demographic change and its impact on sustainable development and human rights in current public and political debates. The messages will be evidence- and rights-based and will provide a balanced approach that highlights challenges, opportunities and solutions. A document containing the messages developed will be submitted to HLCP at its fiftieth session for review and approval. The common messaging will be shared, as appropriate, at co-sponsored and other events convened by interested members of the task team, possibly including the Second World Summit for Social Development (to be held from 4 to 6 November 2025 in Qatar), the sixty-fourth session of the Commission for Social Development and the fifty-ninth session of the Commission on Population and Development, to be held in 2026.
- **Proposal for a system-wide approach.** The task team will further develop the initial common messages to produce a paper featuring a set of United Nations system guiding principles and policy recommendations designed to facilitate support to Member States and other stakeholders. The recommendations will be aligned with intergovernmental processes and United Nations norms and standards. They will promote a common understanding of strategic responses to demographic realities that are based on evidence and foresight and are grounded in the principles of respect for human rights, 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 HLCP at its fifty-first session.

B. Phase 2: May 2026–April 2027

9. Building on the outputs of the first phase, and bearing in mind the available resources and capacities, as well as priorities, the task team will develop, for the consideration of HLCP, a plan of activities for the second year that will focus on more programmatic and operational deliverables. The following are indicative examples of phase 2 outputs:

- **System-wide approach to demographic change.** This output would be developed in accordance with the proposal considered by HLCP during the first phase of work.
- **Guidelines for integrating demographic change into United Nations strategic foresight, analysis and long-term planning.** Such an output could also inform the preparations for the review of the implementation of the Declaration on Future Generations to be held at the eighty-third session of the General Assembly.
- **Guidelines for country support.** In order to operationalize the system-wide approach, practical guidelines for United Nations country teams and regional mechanisms on integrating demographic change into national development strategies could be developed and disseminated, in collaboration with the United Nations Sustainable Development Group.
- **Report on impacts of demographic change on sustainable development beyond 2030.** Such a report could provide evidence to support the inclusion of demographic change in national development strategies, sectoral development plans, macroeconomic reviews, public budgets and the post-2030 development agenda.
- **Advocacy and communication strategy.** Such an output would be developed based on the common messages approved by HLCP during the first phase of work.

IV. Membership and working methods

10. The task team is co-led by UNFPA and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs 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. In addition to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the work will be aligned 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, 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, initiatives and agreements (such as the Commission on Population and Development, the Commission for Social Development, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030) and the Pact for the Future) to guide its work.

12. Moreover, the task team may engage with stakeholders, including from academia, the private sector and civil society. UNFPA and the Department for Economic and Social Affairs, in consultation with other members of the task team, may convene meetings of experts to glean inputs that can inform and guide the team's work.

13. The work of the task team is time-bound and will conclude upon its submission of agreed outputs. The task team may propose the establishment of, inter alia, a standing coordination mechanism, communities of practice, peer-to-peer exchanges or advisory support for normative processes in its final recommendations to HLCP.
