Reflections on the Past and Future of the ICPD Programme of Action in the UNECE Region

In 1994, the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo produced the groundbreaking Programme of Action, adopted by 179 nations. This pivotal document highlighted the interconnectedness of population, development, and individual well-being. Emphasizing environmental sustainability, women’s empowerment, and gender equality, it expanded the scope of family planning to encompass sexual and reproductive health and rights. Additionally, the Programme of Action went beyond a limited economic understanding of development, extending its scope to include the well-being and quality of life for both current and future generations. The United Nations subsequently incorporated many Programme of Action goals into the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The United Nations Commission on Population and Development is now reviewing the five-year implementation of the Programme of Action, with a new assessment slated for its thirtieth anniversary next year. The recent UNECE Regional Conference in Geneva, titled Population and Development: Ensuring Rights and Choices, played a crucial role in this process, providing insights into the Programme of Action’s implementation in the broader European region.

While overall improvements were noted, challenges persist, particularly in education, health, and the protection of vulnerable groups. Progress is still uneven across and within countries, adding complexity to the implementation landscape. Concerningly, multiple forms of inequality and discrimination continue to hinder individuals from realizing their full potential. The Regional Conference Report not only identifies these challenges but also offers proactive recommendations. Addressing declining fertility rates, an aging population, and demographic shifts in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the report stresses the need for innovative approaches to bolster societies’ demographic resilience. Investing in human capital, dismantling barriers to unleash individual potential, and fostering inclusive societies are key strategies. The report emphasizes the importance of listening to people’s needs and desires, presenting various good practices as examples. These recommendations hold significant relevance for policymakers in post-Yugoslav countries and beyond.

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