



# Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
24 November 2024

English only

---

## Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-ninth session

10–21 March 2025

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”

### **Statement submitted by Population Connection, Population Matters, and Population Media Center, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

---

\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## **Statement**

Our organizations – Population Connection, Population Matters, and Population Media Center – are deeply concerned by the growing pressures of population growth, unsustainable resource consumption, and the inequality faced by women and girls globally, particularly in regions where access to family planning, education, and reproductive healthcare is severely limited. We are equally troubled by the impacts of these dynamics on environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, and the increasing vulnerability of low-income communities to the impacts of the climate crisis. Through advocacy, education, and action, we are committed to addressing these challenges and issue a joint call for increased international investment in family planning and women’s empowerment as a critical step toward sustainable development.

### **Population dynamics and gender equality**

We emphasize that women’s empowerment is central to population stabilization and environmental sustainability. Population growth, especially in the fastest-growing regions, is closely linked to gender inequality, poverty, and lack of access to education and healthcare. We advocate for universal access to contraceptives and reproductive healthcare, alongside investments in education for girls. These investments are essential to achieving all 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Research shows that when women have greater control over their reproductive choices, fertility rates decline, leading to positive impacts on economic development and social welfare.

### **Current challenges affecting implementation**

One of the primary barriers to achieving the Beijing Platform for Action’s goals is the persistent unmet need for contraception. Over 257 million women globally have an unmet need for modern contraception. Projections suggest that by 2030, this number could reach 272 million due to the inadequate scaling up of family planning services in response to rapid population growth in lower-income nations.

This unmet need contributes to high fertility rates, unintended pregnancies – which make up half of all pregnancies worldwide – and maternal mortality and morbidity.

This challenge highlights the gap between global commitments and local realities, where cultural barriers, poor infrastructure, and insufficient funding prevent women from exercising their reproductive rights. Only 56 per cent of women aged 15–49 who are married or in-union can make decisions about their sexual and reproductive health and rights. We advocate for rights-based family planning policies to address these inequalities and promote reproductive autonomy for all women.

Globally, around 120 million girls remain out of school, and 12 million girls are married annually before their 18th birthday, exposing them to a high risk of maternal morbidity and mortality, and robbing them of their childhood as well as educational and professional opportunities. Based on current progress, child marriage is not expected to end before 2092. Child marriage perpetuates poverty and inequality, limiting opportunities for girls and further entrenching gender disparities. According to the UN Gender Snapshot Report 2024, the path to eradicating poverty for women and girls could take another 137 years.

Even in many high-income countries, women continue to face significant challenges. Despite legal protections, women often earn less than men for the same jobs, face gender-based discrimination in the workplace, and are subjected to violence and misogynistic attitudes. These challenges are compounded by sexist policies that

restrict women's bodily autonomy, limiting access to safe abortion, contraception, and other healthcare services. The pervasive nature of these issues highlights that gender inequality is a global challenge, affecting women in both regions of the Global North and the Global South alike.

### **Integrating population into sustainable development**

With the global population having surpassed 8 billion, we face unprecedented strain on natural resources and critical ecosystems. Population dynamics are often neglected in global climate and environmental discussions, even though population growth exacerbates environmental degradation, resource depletion, and biodiversity loss – all of which disproportionately affect women and girls. In developing regions, women often bear the brunt of these impacts, facing increased workloads, health risks, and limited access to resources. Our organizations advocate for a holistic Population, Health, and Environment (PHE) approach (also known as One Health), which integrates reproductive healthcare with environmental conservation efforts. This approach supports both sustainable development and women's empowerment, helping to reduce pressure on natural resources while improving the health and well-being of communities – directly aligning with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

### **The interconnectedness of women's rights, population, and the environment**

As Thoraya Ahmed Obaid, former United Nations Under-Secretary-General and United Nations Population Fund Executive Director, noted, “We cannot confront the massive challenges of poverty, hunger, disease, and environmental destruction unless we address issues of population and reproductive health.” The links between women's rights, population dynamics, and environmental sustainability are undeniable. When women have control over their fertility and can choose the number and timing of their children, several positive outcomes follow:

- **Improved health for women and children:** Access to family planning services reduces maternal mortality rates, improves child health, and empowers women to make informed decisions about their bodies and families.
- **Enhanced educational and economic opportunities:** Women with fewer children are more likely to pursue education and participate in the workforce, leading to economic empowerment and social development.
- **Reduced environmental impact:** Slower population growth eases the strain on essential natural resources like water and arable land, reduces pressure on natural habitats, and helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action are integral to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Gender equality and women's empowerment are at the heart of the Sustainable Development Goals. Our work aligns with multiple Sustainable Development Goals and we are committed to integrating population dynamics into development strategies to ensure environmental sustainability and gender equality.

### **Recommendations for future actions**

- **Strengthening access to reproductive health services:** Our organizations advocate for increased global investment in family planning. To meet the goal of zero unmet need for family planning, as recommended by the 2019 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Nairobi Summit and the High-Level Commission monitoring progress on the ICPD+25 commitments, it is imperative for governments to significantly expand their family planning programs. Reducing fertility through these programs will free

young girls and women from the burdens of early childbearing and child-rearing. Scaling up family planning efforts must also involve fostering an environment that promotes awareness, education, and the empowerment of women and girls to make informed choices regarding their reproductive health.

- Education as empowerment: Investing in girls' education remains one of the most effective strategies for reducing fertility rates and alleviating environmental pressures. Education, healthcare, and employment opportunities for women can drive demographic transitions characterized by low fertility and low mortality rates, as well as accelerated economic development.
- Ending harmful societal norms: We emphasize the need for global cooperation to challenge restrictive cultural norms and policies that limit women's rights and opportunities. Breaking down these barriers is crucial to creating an environment where women are empowered to exercise their reproductive rights and pursue education and employment on equal footing with men.
- Embracing integrated solutions: High-income countries providing bilateral and multilateral aid should recognise the potential of incorporating sexual and reproductive healthcare into climate and biodiversity budgets and actions, as modelled by the integrated Population, Health, and Environment approach.

The work of Population Connection, Population Matters, and Population Media Center aligns with the broader goals of the Beijing Declaration. We believe that gender equality cannot be achieved without addressing population dynamics, providing reproductive autonomy, and ensuring environmental sustainability. At the 69th Commission on the Status of Women, we call for stronger partnerships between governments and civil society to implement rights-based approaches to family planning and education, contributing to a more equitable and sustainable future for all.

---