



## Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
30 November 2015

Original: English

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### Commission on Population and Development

#### Forty-ninth session

11-15 April 2016

Item 4 of the provisional agenda<sup>1</sup>

**General debate on national experience in population matters:  
“Strengthening the demographic evidence base for the post-2015  
development agenda”**

**Statement submitted by Curia Generalizia Agostiniana —  
Augustinians International, Congregations of St. Joseph and  
Passionists International, non-governmental organizations in  
special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council<sup>2</sup>**

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.

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<sup>1</sup> E/CN.9/2016/1.

<sup>2</sup> The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

### **Strengthening the demographic evidence base for the Post-2015 development agenda with a focus on migration**

Augustinians International (AI), Congregations of St. Joseph (CSJ) and Passionists International (PI), United Nations NGOs accredited with ECOSOC, are convinced that strengthening the demographic evidence base is vital to realizing the post-2015 development agenda since this would help address root causes of poverty, inequality and injustice. The October 2015 expert group meeting organized by the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs stressed the importance of demographic data for monitoring and evaluating any development agenda “as population numbers are the common denominator used in constructing most indicators of human development.” Data disaggregation enables us to differentiate levels of achieving sustainable development goals across all populations.

An especially important area wherein lack of accurate, comparable and disaggregated data hinders addressing root causes of poverty, inequality and injustice in social development is migration, especially irregular migration. We welcome each and every Sustainable Development Goal, none of which can be met without national and worldwide success in achieving justice for the significant percentage of the world’s 232 million migrants, the irregular and undocumented migrants. The agenda’s robust and ambitious dream, ‘leave no one behind,’ cannot be fulfilled without its realization for all populations. Hence we welcome the inclusion of diaspora/migrants and more so those at risk or in crisis into sustainable development agenda as timely and of paramount importance especially regarding human rights.

Migration is a significant driver of development and one of the three major demographic components of population change, along with births and deaths. It is also the component most difficult to measure, model and project, especially when irregular. Therefore improving the data system for generating information on migration flows and migrant stocks is a necessary constituent for strengthening the demographic evidence base for guiding policy-making and public debate on implementing, monitoring and reviewing sustainable development goals.

In general, estimates of the number of irregular migrants are generally inaccurate, inconsistent, incomplete and incomparable, making reliable systematic data collection mechanisms urgent. While some countries make “guestimates”, reliable data on the number of irregular migrants are more difficult to obtain at the global level. The 2014 annual report of the International Organization for Migration suggested that approximately over one fifth of all international migrants, about 50 million of the world’s 232 million international migrants, are irregular/undocumented migrants. The figure is on the rise with the current migration/refugee crisis in Europe. Data compiled by Frontex showed that in the first eight months of 2015 alone, about 500,000 people entered Europe through irregular means and 15 per cent of them were children, many unaccompanied.

Inequality as a root cause of poverty is masked by non-disaggregated data. Reliable high-quality data and statistics are needed to understand the situation of migrant workers and their families and to promote migration policies for universal

sustainable development goals, especially for human rights of undocumented migrant workers and their families. However, even in countries with some data on the number of irregular migrants, data collection systems on irregular migration do not collect disaggregated information concerning socio-demographic characteristics of the migrants, like gender and age. Thus, undocumented migrant women and children are omitted within qualitative migration statistics, which makes it difficult to collect information on their specific situation, seeking access to basic social rights, like healthcare, education, housing and access to justice. Thus migration and other relevant social policies fail to take into account specific situations faced by undocumented women and children and to mainstream both gender and family-oriented approaches granting social protection.

Civil society organizations fear that without quantitative, qualitative, consistent and regularly updated statistics, policy decisions and public opinions may be based on erroneous information possibly from biased sources. In this context, the lack of reliable, exact, timely and comparable data on the number, living conditions and human rights of undocumented migrant workers and their families negatively affects the development and management of coherent public policies on migration and on migration-related issues. More than quantity, migration statistics ought to give due attention to quality, the specific issues facing undocumented migrants especially women and children. Such statistics must mainstream disaggregated data according to gender and age without which inequalities and discrimination of vulnerable undocumented migrant groups such as women and children are worsened.

Some factors are closely linked to the challenges associated with irregular migration. From the undocumented and irregular migrant perspective, basing gathering of comparable data solely on systems structured on acquiring information upon entry and exit of second or and third country nationals may be incomprehensive as such movement avoids these regular and organized channels. Focusing only on national censuses is also problematic as undocumented migrants may avoid census interviews fearing apprehension or data sharing with public authorities. In all, traditional sources for demographic data, namely civil registration and vital statistics systems, health information systems and other administrative data sources are often closed to many migrant populations, especially the undocumented. It is difficult and sometimes impossible for irregular migrants to become visible or seek help from regular systems of their host countries for fear of later consequences. Without protection for undocumented migrants, data collected from these channels are incomprehensive and of little value, and irregular migrants remain outside local, national and global statistics, donor budgets, finance plans and expenditure reports — indeed the benefits of the sustainable development goals.

The increasing “securitization” and “criminalization” of cross-border movements of people and the emphasis on border control have been identified as another reason why irregular migration eludes data system. The situation also detracts from the need to address other causes of irregularity, including inadequate visa and residence policies, administrative failures, complex procedures of residence and work permits. Again strengthening the demographic evidence base is essential to respond to this situation, especially from the perspective of target 10.7 of the Agenda 2030, namely to “facilitate orderly, safe, and responsible migration and mobility of people, ensuring safe, orderly”.

While appreciating complexities in reliable data collection, sharing and utilization, we recommend that efforts be made to curb inaccuracies, use of “cumulative flows,” discrepancies between sources, unreliable, and no sources. Experts’ suggestions for standardize survey questionnaires, data collection, capacity-building and enhanced data exchange cooperation should be heeded and implemented. Attention must be paid to benefits of ‘data revolution’ — increasing availability of alternative source data by expanding traditional data collection to include alternatives. This integration of multiple data sources would enhance implementation of wide ranges of Sustainable Development Goals, targets and indicators. Responding to data complexities, particularly in the data life cycle — production and utilization — and translating data into policies and accountability tools demand that data are communicated easily and accessible to policy makers and practitioners on the ground. This would be achieved through a stronger cohesion between data production, dissemination and utilization.

We believe achieving improved effective data collection systems requires developing and strengthening the role of civil society, migrants/diaspora groups, promoting coordination amongst other stakeholders, and guaranteeing data protection by ensuring that information collected on undocumented migrant workers and their families are used to their benefit and by delinking data collection on migration from immigration and border control. Better data collection and estimates are relevant for policy-making in a number of fields such as provision of basic services and protection of human rights of undocumented migrant workers and their families. Promoting non-traditional data sources demands funding for non-traditional actors to increase their capacity and quality.

We also want to use this opportunity to express our appreciation for the Commission’s invitation to civil society to participate in the review of the Commission’s methods of work. Realizing that migration is part of the Cairo Plan of Action for population and development; and recognizing that it is only in this Commission that migration is specifically treated within the entire United Nations system, we hope that the review would provide for a strengthened and broadened focus on migration by the Commission. We commend the Commission’s due attention to the important relationships of migration and development, with population dynamics, and with human rights in its International Migration Report 2013.

In conclusion we want to reemphasize that the collection of reliable qualitative data on undocumented migrants is fundamentally a prerequisite for consistent policy-making with an emphasis on social issues, such as adequate protection for crime victims and access to justice, healthcare, housing and education indeed the realization of the sustainable development goals for undocumented migrants. Not to pay attention to this would be a great omission for any attempt on strengthening the demographic evidence base. Improvement in this area requires strong cooperation amongst all stakeholders, and better coordination at the local, regional and global levels.