



**United  
Nations**

Department of  
Economic and  
Social Affairs

Side-event to CSW70

***Demographic Resilience and Access to Justice:  
Securing Rights and Choices in a Changing World***

Thursday 12 March 11.30am-12.45pm

UN Secretariat, Conference Room 6

**1. Background and rationale**

**Global megatrends** such as income inequality, climate change, demographic shifts, digitalization, and urbanisation are shaping the future of societies. Of these, the United Nations Secretary-General considers demographic shifts one of the most important megatrends defining progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)<sup>1</sup>.

Demographic situations vary greatly between and within countries and regions - from high fertility, youthful populations and population growth to low fertility, population ageing, and population decline. These diverse demographic situations require **rights-based approaches underpinned by robust data and evidence** to address the challenges and leverage the opportunities of demographic change<sup>2</sup>.

Today, however, an alarmist rhetoric is resurfacing regarding demographic futures and fertility, focusing on population numbers being either too high or too low. This trend risks driving policies centered on demographic targets rather than human rights and well-being. However, a rights-based approach to population policy is not separate from demographic or population health goals; rather, it is foundational. By upholding individual rights and reproductive autonomy, countries can effectively plan for and adapt to demographic shifts. This approach ensures people can make informed, voluntary choices about their bodies, lives, and futures. It also ensures that people are supported at key transitions across the life-course including transitions from adolescence to adulthood, entry into the labor market, and in later life in support of healthy aging. In short, while rights-based population policy is anchored by reproductive autonomy it also supports the human capabilities of individuals and families in a world which is experiencing simultaneous megatrends of rapid urbanization, climate crisis shocks, fragility and conflict and multi-dimensional inequalities.

As the world navigates these unprecedented and diverse demographic shifts, the concept of **demographic resilience** has emerged as a cornerstone for sustainable development. Demographic resilience is the capacity of societies to anticipate, adapt to, and manage profound population changes - such as ageing, low fertility, and migration - to ensure long-term prosperity

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/desa/unen/report>

<sup>2</sup> <https://unsceb.org/topics/demographic-change>

and inclusive and gender-equal societies. It entails moving beyond crisis management to evidence-based policies that support human capital, gender equality and rights, resilient and inclusive societies.

At the heart of this resilience lies **access to justice** across the life course. The law and policy framework and institutional enabling environment shape access to basic rights, choices and opportunities across justice, health, education, economic, and social protection spheres. Across the lifecourse of a woman, different services and support are required including access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights to prevent and respond to gender-based violence. Access to information, services and commodities require a justice system that enables and supports access to rights as well as supporting systems of accountability.

This side-event will explore the critical intersection of **demographic shifts, inclusive data systems, and access to justice**, emphasizing that a country's demographic resilience depends on its commitment to human rights and leaving no one behind. Across a range of demographic contexts - from high fertility and youthful populations to populations with low fertility, population ageing and population decline - this session will explore how gender equality and women's empowerment are shaped by national laws, policies, institutional arrangements and data systems. The event will showcase how a life course approach to rights and choices is crucial in sustaining equitable, inclusive and just societies. The session will underscore why human interactions - from couple relations and care responsibilities to individuals' engagement with justice, social protection, health and financial systems - need to be supported by universal legal identity and equality before the law, particularly in times of fragility and uncertainty. Central to this effort is the **utilization of robust data**, specifically through the analysis of census and administrative data, and the **strengthening of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS)**. By ensuring that births, marriages, and deaths are legally recognized, women and girls can transition from being "invisible" to being protected against child marriage, with clear claims to inheritance, ownership, custody, and life-saving health interventions.

By reviewing recent trends in SDG indicators 3.7.2 (adolescent birth rates), 5.3.1 (child marriage), 5.6.1 (proportion of women aged 15–49 years who make their own informed decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive health care), 5.6.2 (Number of countries with laws and regulations that guarantee full and equal access to women and men aged 15 years and older to sexual and reproductive health care, information and education), 16.9.1 (universal legal identity), and 17.19.2 (proportion of countries that have conducted a population/housing census in the last 10 years), this session will demonstrate that ensuring and strengthening access to justice for all women and girls through providing legal identity and utilizing robust data is fundamental in advancing demographic resilience.

## 2. Event Objectives

This event will convene leaders to strategize on bridging the gap between de jure legal commitments and lived realities of women, using data-driven approaches, including SDG monitoring, to support policy planning that promotes inclusive development and demographic resilience amidst rapid and dramatic changes. This discussion underscores that empowering women and safeguarding their rights is not only a moral imperative but also a practical strategy for social stability, economic growth, and effective governance. Specifically, the session aims to achieve the following:

- **Underscore the centrality of gender and rights:** Reiterate the criticality of gender equality and human rights, including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, and the right to be free from violence, in the context of demographic change
- **Unpack the data-justice link:** demonstrate how integrated population data systems, grounded in legal ID systems and population censuses, are key enablers and facilitators to accessing rights, choices and opportunities including access to health systems and educational opportunities, as well as access to social protection, inheritance, etc.
- **Foster cross-regional learning:** Share best practices on how countries are adapting to population dynamics and promoting demographic resilience by strengthening inclusive legal systems.
- **Promote accountability:** Use the monitoring of **SDG Indicators 5.6.1** (proportion of women aged 15–49 years who make their own informed decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive health care) **and 5.6.2** (the extent to which countries have laws and regulations that guarantee full and equal access to sexual and reproductive health care, information and education) as well as the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) as a tool for legal and policy reform.

## 3. Format and Participants

**Format:** A Ministerial-level opening segment, followed a panel of experts

**Co-hosting Member States:** North Macedonia (tbc), Uruguay (tbc), Tunisia (tbc)

**Co-hosting partners:** DESA (confirmed)

#### 4. Provisional agenda

11.30-11.35am	<b>Welcome</b> by moderator
11.35-11.45am	<b>Keynote speech</b> by Diene Keita, UNFPA Executive Director
11.45-12.05pm	<p><b>Ministerial Panel:</b> 5 mn interventions to address the following guiding questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In light of the resurfacing "alarmist rhetoric" regarding population numbers, how is your government working to ensure that <b>national policies</b> remain grounded in <b>human rights, including individual reproductive choice</b> rather than shifting toward target-driven demographic agendas?</li> <li>• As societies face diverse shifts—ranging from rapid growth to population ageing—what specific <b>legal or policy reforms</b> has your ministry championed to ensure that gender equality and women’s empowerment are core strategies for long-term social stability and economic growth?</li> </ul>
12.05-12.30	<b>Experts panel:</b> 5mn interventions by 4 experts, tbc
12.30-12.40	Interactive <b>Q&amp;A</b> (time allowing)
12.40-12.45	<b>Closing remarks</b> by Bjørg Sandkjær, Assistant Secretary-General, DESA