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**Population and sustainable development, in particular sustained
and inclusive economic growth**

Statement submitted by Family Planning NSW, a non- governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council¹

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.

¹ The present statement is issued without formal editing.

Statement

We welcome the theme of the fifty-fifth session of the Commission on Population and Development focused on population and sustainable development, in particular sustained and inclusive economic growth. Family Planning NSW, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, is honoured to present this joint-statement along with the International Planned Parenthood Federation East & South East Asia and Oceania Region (IPPF ESEAOR), MSI Reproductive Choices and SERAC-Bangladesh.

Family Planning NSW is one of Australia's leading providers of sexual and reproductive health services. We also work internationally, supporting our partners in the Pacific to deliver sexual and reproductive health education, information and clinical services.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights encompass all matters related to puberty, relationships, sexuality, sexual health, fertility and birth. It recognises the right of all people to have control over, and make informed decisions on, matters related to their bodies, sexuality and reproduction, free from coercion, discrimination and violence, and is intrinsically linked to gender equality, population and sustainable development.

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and embedding outcomes from the Programme of Action into on-going practice can only become a reality with strong support for sexual and reproductive health and rights, particularly around the areas of contraception and comprehensive sexuality education.

1. Introduction

Sustainable economic growth and decent work for all, particularly for women and girls, cannot be a reality without sexual and reproductive health and rights. Factors such as unmet need for family planning, combined with traditional gender expectations and limited access to education, leave women and girls shouldering much of the responsibility for raising children and running families.

Integration of economic development and sexual and reproductive health and rights is essential for women and girls

Economic independence is an enabler for both women and men to exercise control over their lives and make informed choices. At an individual level, the benefits of increasing women's workforce participation rates include additional financial security for women and their families, increased savings for retirement and the ability to contribute to a prosperous and sustained society.² Enabling women to engage meaningfully within the workforce, and lowering the fertility rate, allow families to invest more in each child's health and education.³

Over the past few decades, there has been a lessening of the divide between men and women across the developed world in a number of labour market indicators. However, there remains a tremendous amount of work to be done to close the gender gap both within Australia and countries across the Pacific.

While the gender gap in overall workforce participation rate for those aged 20-74 years in Australia is 10.5 percentage points⁴, this gap is significantly higher in

² United Nations Population Fund. Working paper: Linking women's economic empowerment, eliminating gender-based violence and enabling sexual and reproductive health and rights New York; 2020.

³ Canning D, Schultz TP. The economic consequences of reproductive health and family planning. *The Lancet*. 2012;380(9837):165-71.

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics. Gender Indicators, Australia. Canberra; 2020.

countries in the Pacific such as Samoa (with a gap of 16 percentage points) and Fiji (with a gap of 34 percentage points).⁵

Protecting the sexual and reproductive health and rights of all people contributes to significant economic gains for individuals, families and nations. Sexual and reproductive health and rights contributes to economic growth and decent work for all by supporting women and men to decide whether or when to have children. This, in turn, has been shown to reduce healthcare costs, improve productivity and engagement in the workforce and increase rates of education attainment.^{6,7} Engagement of more women in the workforce, particularly at a country level, would enhance the economic prosperity of countries, as has been demonstrated in many developed nations.

2. Access to long-acting reversible contraception empowers women, promotes sexual and reproductive health and rights and fosters sustained and inclusive economic growth

Increasing long-acting reversible contraception uptake promotes sustainable economic growth and enables full and productive employment through reducing rates of unintended pregnancy. As the name suggests, long-acting reversible contraception is highly effective, long lasting and reversible.⁸

While use of long-acting reversible contraception is slowly increasing in Australia and across the globe, some women face difficulties in accessing long-acting reversible contraception due to a lack of familiarity or knowledge about these methods as well as limited access to health professionals who are trained in long-acting reversible contraception procedures.⁹ Extending provision by registered nurses and other qualified health professionals, with the required knowledge and skills, may increase the accessibility of these contraceptive methods.

3. Comprehensive sexuality education as an enabler of sexual and reproductive health and rights

It is crucial that all people receive high-quality and evidence-based comprehensive sexuality education. Comprehensive sexuality education is particularly significant for people who are vulnerable and marginalised, including people with disability and those who are disengaged from formal education systems. Comprehensive sexuality education promotes teaching of lifelong skills including healthy relationships, health literacy and decision making as well as about fertility, pregnancy options and contraception.¹⁰

Comprehensive sexuality education should be available across multiple settings including community-based programs. When delivered as an early intervention strategy, comprehensive sexuality education supports all people to make informed choices regarding their sexual and reproductive health. By ensuring access to evidence-based comprehensive sexuality education, this will contribute to reduced teenage pregnancy rates, and increase the participation of young women in

⁵ Asian Development Bank. Gender Statistics: The Pacific and Timor-Leste. Philippines; 2016.

⁶ United Nations Population Fund. Working paper: Linking women's economic empowerment, eliminating gender-based violence and enabling sexual and reproductive health and rights New York; 2020.

⁷ Temmerman M, Khosla R, Say L. Sexual and reproductive health and rights: A global development, health, and human rights priority. *The Lancet*. 2014;384(9941):e30-e1.

⁸ Black KI, Bateson D, Harvey C. Australian women need increased access to long-acting reversible contraception. *Medical Journal of Australia*. 2013;199(5):317-8.

⁹ Garrett CC, Keogh LA, Kavanagh A, Tomnay J, Hocking JS. Understanding the low uptake of long-acting reversible contraception by young women in Australia: a qualitative study. *BMC women's health*. 2015;15(1):1-10.

¹⁰ United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization. Emerging evidence, lessons and practice in comprehensive sexuality education: A global review. France; 2015.

the workforce.¹¹ Reducing teenage pregnancy rates will allow more women to complete their school education, continue with studies and seek employment in the skilled workforce, thereby increasing the economic prosperity of their family and community.

Consistent implementation of comprehensive sexuality education is needed within Australia and the Pacific to ensure all people develop optimal levels of literacy, including health literacy, which fosters development of essential life skills and opportunities for employment.

4. Recommendations

To ensure achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 8 ‘promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all,’ the following recommendations are made:

- invest in long-acting reversible contraception to ensure all women are able to access their preferred method of contraception and fully and meaningfully engage in the workforce

Civil society organisations are well placed to support increased access to safe, effective and affordable methods of contraception, including long-acting reversible contraception. For example, Vanuatu Family Health Association, in conjunction with Family Planning NSW, works to provide contraception and education to women and girls. Since 2014 the partnership has provided contraception to 21,000 women in Vanuatu. IPPF ESEAOR’s 25 Member Associations delivered 296,274 long-acting reversible contraception related couple years of protection in 2020 through a network of over 8,000 service delivery points.

- enhance the capacity of the health workforce to provide all contraceptive options, including long-acting reversible contraception

Civil society organisations have extensive experience up-skilling local providers in family planning methods. For example, in partnership with United Nations Population Fund and governments in Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Tonga, Family Planning NSW developed and delivered clinical contraception training to local service providers. In 2020, partnership training enabled 50 clinicians in Fiji and Kiribati to improve their contraceptive skills, including training in long-acting reversible contraception.

- ensure consistent implementation of evidence-based comprehensive sexuality education to people of all ages, particularly women and girls, at a national and/or regional level

Civil society organisations are strategically placed to work with stakeholders, governments and funders to develop evidence-based comprehensive sexuality education curricula and training packages. For example, IPPF ESEAOR provides comprehensive sexuality education sessions in schools and other settings, with Member Associations forming partnerships and making arrangements that fit local needs while ensuring a rights-based curriculum. IPPF ESEAOR provided 22.4 million young people with comprehensive sexuality education in 2020 and trained over 6,200 people as peer educators.

¹¹ Le Mat MLJ. (S)exclusion in the sexuality education classroom: young people on gender and power relations. Sex Education. 2017;17(4):413-24.