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POPIN: A CATALYST FOR A BETTER INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE  
OF POPULATION INFORMATION

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**POPIN: A CATALYST FOR A BETTER INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE  
OF POPULATION INFORMATION\***

In response to the expressed need, particularly of the developing countries, the Economic and Social Council adopted resolution 1979/33 of 9 May 1979 calling for the establishment of an international Population Information Network (POPIN), under the aegis of the United Nations, to assist in the development of national and regional infrastructure for population information. POPIN is a decentralized network of population libraries, documentation centres, information services, clearing-houses and organizations supporting population information activities, whether national, regional or international, for the co-ordination of population information activities.

The purpose of POPIN is to aid in establishing new information services and in strengthening existing ones. POPIN promotes compatibility among information services to improve the flow of population information and to maximize the use of available resources.

In January 1981, with the financial support of the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), a two-member Co-ordinating Unit was established within the Population Division of the United Nations Secretariat. It is responsible for the development and operation of the Network under the guidance of an Advisory Committee.

Since October 1984, when the POPIN Co-ordinator relinquished his post to take up another assignment at ESCAP in Bangkok, POPIN has remained without a full-time Co-ordinator. This has been due to a substantial reduction in UNFPA funding of the project and the subsequent freeze on external recruitment for

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\*Prepared by the POPIN Co-ordinating Unit, Population Division, Department of International Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations Secretariat.

all United Nations posts. However, the United Nations Secretariat remains fully committed to meeting its responsibilities for the Co-ordinating Unit. Continuing efforts are being made by the Director of the Population Division to solve this crisis -- efforts that include, in particular, integrating the functioning of the Co-ordinating Unit within the United Nations regular budget. This, of course, is not possible at this time because of the current ~~serious financial crisis in the United Nations~~. The Director is also trying to seek financial support from other sources in order to enable the Secretariat to obtain the services of a person with the necessary skills and experience for the post of POPIN Co-ordinator. In the meantime, the functions of the Co-ordinator have been assigned to a senior staff member of the Population Division who serves as Acting Co-ordinator along with his other regular duties.

The activities of the POPIN Co-ordinating Unit to date have been focused on:

1. The publication of the POPIN Bulletin to keep Network members informed of current activities and latest developments in the population information field (seven issues have been published to date).
2. Preparation and publication of a series of manuals for use by Network members in setting up or improving their own population information services. Three manuals have been published to date: (a) Guide to the Computerization of Population Documentation Storage and Retrieval Systems; (b) Guide to Selecting a Classification Scheme for a Population Information Centre; (c) Guide to Networking for Population Information Centres.
3. Preparation and publication of an Inventory of Training Materials for Population Information Services, the first bibliography of training materials for population information services ever produced.
4. Management and maintenance of the POPIN Thesaurus: Population Multilingual Thesaurus, through a Working Group headed by the Committee for International Cooperation in National Research in Demography (CICRED). The POPIN Thesaurus, which is now considered the standard control vocabulary for population information, is available in English, French and Spanish. It has also been translated into Portuguese by the Fundação Sistema Estadual de Analise de Dados (SEADE) in Brazil and into Arabic by the League of Arab

States. The Portuguese version was published in late 1986 and the Arabic translation is now being edited for publication in the near future.

5. Promoting the establishment of regional and subregional components of the Network. The establishment of POPIN has had a significant impact on world-wide population information activities and has served as a stimulus to the strengthening of existing population information activities not only within the United Nations system but also in developed and developing countries, as well as to the establishment of new national, subregional and regional networks; for example, the Asia-Pacific POPIN, POPIN-Africa, ASEAN POPIN and China POPIN.

6. Providing, on a very limited basis, reference and information specialist referral services and assistance in the formulation of project proposals.

7. Organizing co-operative population information resource centres at international population conferences to which POPIN member institutions contribute copies of their major publications, such as those organized at Mexico City in 1984 during the International Conference on Population and at Florence, Italy in 1985 during the International Population Conference of the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (IUSSP).

8. Servicing the global POPIN Advisory Committee meetings and working groups. The most recent meeting of the POPIN Advisory Committee was held at Beijing, China, in October 1986, hosted by the China Population Information Centre, which resulted in a set of 32 recommendations (see the annex to this paper).

9. Co-sponsoring meetings with regional population information networks, such as the Expert Working Group Meeting on Population Information Networking in the Asia-Pacific Region, which was convened at Beijing in October 1986, jointly with the Asia-Pacific POPIN and the China Population Information Centre.

The above activities have been carried out within the limits of the staff and financial resources available and with the co-operation of the Network's 108 member institutions located in 54 countries and two territories.

The Advisory Committee of POPIN guides the work of the Co-ordinating Unit. Its membership consists of high-level representatives from member

institutions of the Network in both developed and developing countries who have expertise in the establishment and development of population information services. Normally, it meets once a year to review the activities of the Co-ordinating Unit in order to ensure that those activities are responsive to the needs of POPIN members at different levels

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RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GLOBAL  
POPULATION INFORMATION NETWORK (POPIN)  
ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING  
(Beijing, 22-25 October 1986)

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## INTRODUCTION

The Advisory Committee of the global Population Information Network (POPIN) held its fourth session in Beijing, from 22 to 25 October 1986, following the meeting of the Asia-Pacific POPIN Expert Working Group on Networking in the Asia-Pacific Region which took place on 16-20 October 1986.

The Advisory Committee reviewed the activities of the Network since its last meeting, took note of the recommendations of the Asia-Pacific POPIN Expert Working Group, discussed the recommendations of the United Nations Committee for Programme and Co-ordination and the proposed work programme for 1987 of the POPIN Co-ordinating Unit. In light of the discussions, the Committee made the following recommendations, which update or supersede the recommendations made at its third session. Implementation of the recommendations is contingent on the availability of funding.

The Advisory Committee recognizes that the set of recommendations is very far reaching and that it may not be possible for all of them to be implemented during the forthcoming two years. Prioritization for implementation is left to the Secretariat.

The Advisory Committee expresses its deep concern on the financial crisis which threaten the very existence of the Co-ordinating Unit. It takes note with satisfaction of the efforts made by the Director of the Population Division of the United Nations Secretariat to solve the crisis, and particularly to try to integrate the functioning of the Co-ordinating Unit within the United Nations regular budget. So much work has been invested in the constitution of the global POPIN that it would be a pity to be obliged to suppress the Co-ordinating Unit at a time when regional POPINs are flourishing everywhere. The Committee takes note also of the position of UNFPA while in passage to make all what it can do to permit the Co-ordinating Unit to continue to flourish in its full capacity as long as another solution is found.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. In general, the POPIN Co-ordinating Unit should continue to function as the central node for the co-ordination of national, subregional, regional and international population information activities. It should continue to pursue a decentralized approach to network building, relying on the initiative of individual members and enhancing co-operation for the mutual benefit of all members. In all activities undertaken by POPIN, a pragmatic division of labour between the POPIN Co-ordinating Unit and the regional population information centres should be maintained, with the goal of most effectively serving the needs of the end users. The Unit should also continue to encourage the development and functioning of regional, subregional and national POPINs, with particular reference to those regions where such networks are currently being prepared, such as the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).



### Publications

2. The semi-annual publication of the POPIN Bulletin should be continued.
3. The POPIN Update should be issued on a quarterly basis.
4. The POPIN Co-ordinating Unit should initiate a policy of inserting a mail-back form in its publications to provide change of address and user response information.
5. A manual on the management of a population information centre should be issued by the POPIN Co-ordinating Unit, oriented -- as should all others -- to specific user's operational needs. All manuals should be prepared in co-operation with regional and national population information centres.
6. The POPIN Co-ordinating Unit should continue to organize and service the POPIN Working Group on the Maintenance and Management of the POPIN Thesaurus, in co-operation with the Committee for International Co-operation in National Research in Demography (CICRED) and the regional networks.
7. A directory of POPIN members should be published, on diskette as well as in hard copy format, if possible.
8. The POPIN Co-ordinating Unit, with the co-operation of the regional population information centres, should assemble and publish a global roster of practitioners working in the field of population information, education and communication.
9. A write-up should be prepared on the activities of POPIN for presentation in Development Forum and other international, regional and national newspapers, or other mass media forums.

### Information exchange and clearing-house activities

10. The POPIN Co-ordinating Unit should keep track of data bases maintained by Network members, and distribute duplicate materials to newly established population information centres.
11. As an on-going activity of the POPIN Co-ordinating Unit, the maintenance and updating of the following files and rosters should be continued, to be made available to members upon request:
  - (a) A file on population information activities of POPIN member institutions;
  - (b) A referral service which should include files on population information projects, programmes and services;
  - (c) A roster of population information practitioners.
12. The POPIN brochure published in 1981 should be updated.

13. Whenever possible, a POPIN Reference Centre should be set up by the POPIN Co-ordinating Unit during international and regional conferences on population or on closely associated issues, as appropriate.

14. The POPIN Co-ordinating Unit should serve as a global clearing-house for reports on methodologies and technologies prepared at the regional and national levels and should report on them in the POPIN Bulletin or in POPIN Update. The Co-ordinating Unit should also continue to prepare and issue methodological and technical studies.

15. In order to improve the knowledge of the extent of interaction within the Network, the POPIN Co-ordinating Unit should consider the feasibility of and, if possible, initiate, with the co-operation of regional and national population information centres, a "traffic analysis". This analysis should cover horizontal and vertical exchanges of correspondence, publications and visits between the POPIN Co-ordinating Unit, regional population information centres and national population information centres.

#### Membership

16. Efforts should be made to increase the membership of POPIN. While doing so, due consideration should be given to the need for commitment and for involvement in the activities of POPIN on the part of its members.

17. All members of POPIN should be regularly informed by the POPIN Co-ordinating Unit of the relevant regional and national population information centres, and the regional and national population information networks should in turn inform their members of the POPIN Co-ordinating Unit.

18. The United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) and other donors should encourage all population information centres for which they are providing support to participate in POPIN, and the funding necessary for such participation should be provided.

19. The POPIN Co-ordinating Unit should seek to promote the development of a population information network in Europe. European representation on the Advisory Committee should also be considered.

20. Each population information centre should be requested by the POPIN Co-ordinating Unit to identify a "contact person" who will be responsible for speeding up information exchange.

21. The POPIN Co-ordinating Unit should prepare a form to be completed by all population information centres in reporting their annual activities; the completed forms should be distributed to all members of the Network.

22. The Co-ordinating Unit should continue to participate in meetings of the regional POPIN programmes.

23. The Co-ordinating Unit should use its best offices to assist regional and national level population information centres to identify external sources of funding for population information activities.

24. The Co-ordinating Unit should continue to assist regional POPIN programmes in arranging study tours and on-site training for visitors from population information centres.

#### Advisory Committee

25. The fifth session of the Advisory Committee should be convened in 1988 and future meetings should take place biennially.

26. To the extent possible within budgetary constraints, the practice of holding Advisory Committee meetings successively in the various regions should be continued. The fifth session of the Advisory Committee will take place in Africa, if possible; the League of Arab States Documentation Centre will be approached regarding the hosting and possible contribution towards the financing of that session.

27. Selected specialists in population, and who are working within the region where the Advisory Committee meeting is being held, should be added as full members to the Committee for that session. The POPIN Co-ordinating and the host regional population information centre should co-operate in selecting those specialists.

28. Representatives of potential donor institutions, including the World Bank, and of regional development banks and funds should be invited to participate in Advisory Committee meetings.

#### Other

29. The POPIN Co-ordinating Unit should make every effort to computerize its work as a matter of urgency and economy.

30. UNFPA should be requested to include population information in all needs assessment missions, as appropriate.

31. The POPIN Co-ordinating Unit should explore the feasibility and should convene, if possible, a donors' meeting in support of population information activities.

32. Recognizing the expected wide use of micro ISIS, the Co-ordinating Unit should investigate the prospects for future maintenance of micro ISIS and should report its findings to the membership.

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