



Assessing the status of implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and its contribution to the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development during the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development

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This year marks the 30th anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo, Egypt, in 1994. The Programme of Action adopted by the Conference affirmed a people-centered approach to population and development, grounded in respect for human rights and recognition of the important interactions between population dynamics and sustainable development. Subsequently, the Millennium Development Goals and, more recently, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have integrated many of its core principles and objectives. Although much has been accomplished since 1994, continuing efforts are needed to achieve the ICPD goals and SDGs to ensure that no one is left behind.

The following key messages draw on three reports of the Secretary-General submitted to the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on Population and Development ([E/CN.9/2024/2](#), [E/CN.9/2024/3](#) and [E/CN.9/2024/4](#)).

Ten key messages

1. Implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action has improved the lives of many.

Since 1994, all world regions have improved access to and reduced gender gaps in education. Significant progress has been made in reducing extreme poverty, which fell globally from 34 to 9 per cent between 1994 and 2021, resulting in a drop of over 1 billion people living in extreme poverty. Life expectancy at birth rose worldwide from 64.5 years in 1994 to 73.7 years in 2024, driven by reductions in mortality rates across all age groups.

2. Fertility has continued to decline but substantial differences remain within and among countries.

High-fertility countries have become concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa, while Eastern and South-Eastern Asia have witnessed significant reductions. Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean remain the two regions with the highest birth rates among adolescents at ages 15-19 years. An increasing proportion of women and couples are having, on average, fewer children than they want or intend to have, with many remaining childless despite a desire for children. Demand for access to technologies for the treatment of infertility will likely increase in the future.

3. Declining fertility and mortality have transformed the age distribution of the global population.

The demographic transition towards longer lives and smaller families has led to a substantial upward shift in the age distribution of the global population. The number of children under age 5 worldwide has remained stable, while the number of persons aged 65 or over has more than doubled in the past 30 years and is expected to double again by 2054. Tailored policies are needed to prepare for the challenges ahead and to take advantage of the opportunities associated with population ageing.

4. The world's population is becoming increasingly urban.

Nearly 58 per cent of the world's population resided in urban areas in 2024, up from around 44 per cent in 1994. The global

continues

share of the rural population, living mostly in developing countries, is expected to continue to decline over the coming decades, reaching 32 per cent in 2050. More than 90 per cent of the increase in the urban population between 2024 and 2050 is expected to occur in developing countries located mostly in Asia and Africa.

5. Progress in implementing the ICPD Programme of Action has been uneven.

Poverty has remained highly concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa, which accounted for 60 per cent of those living in poverty in 2019. Immunization coverage has plateaued over the last decade, leaving 20.5 million children unprotected worldwide, of whom almost half live in Africa. Globally, it is estimated that 164 million women of reproductive age have an unmet need for family planning. Over 60 countries still fall short of the ICPD target of 70 years for life expectancy at birth.

6. Rates of population growth or decline vary widely across countries.

Rapid population growth increases the scale of the investments needed to raise per capita public expenditures to the level required to eradicate poverty, end hunger and malnutrition, and ensure universal access to health care, education and other essential services. In countries experiencing slow population growth or decline, rapid population ageing and shrinking workforces are growing concerns, raising expenditures for long-term care and threatening the sustainability of old-age pension systems. The net inflow of international migrants to high-income countries is helping to sustain positive rates of population growth, given that the balance of births over deaths has been close to zero and sometimes negative.

7. International migrants contribute to the development of countries and communities.

Migrants often play a crucial role in the economies and societies of destination countries by providing critical labour and skills. International migration can also benefit places of origin by fostering foreign direct investment, transfer of skills and technology, and bilateral trade. Remittances help to boost household incomes, reduce poverty, increase school enrolments, improve access to health care, facilitate financial inclusion and support business creation. In 2022, migrants sent home USD 831 billion in remittances, of which USD 647 billion went to low-income or middle-income countries.

8. Expanding educational opportunities continues to pose a major challenge.

Although education is one of the most important means of empowering individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to participate fully in society, meet their basic needs and exercise their human rights, expanding educational opportunities and ensuring quality education for all continues to be a major challenge, especially for low-income and lower-middle-income countries with growing numbers of children and young people. For example, in sub-Saharan Africa, the completion rate for upper secondary education increased by less than 7 percentage points over two decades, rising from 20 to 27 per cent between 2000 and 2021.

9. Changes in consumption and production are the primary drivers of environmental damage.

Rising living standards and changing production and consumption patterns are often a much more significant driver of environmental damage than population increase. Countries that have been contributing the most to unsustainable production and consumption patterns are generally those with high levels of per capita income and slow or negative population growth, not those with low levels of per capita income and rapid population growth. About 70 per cent of the anticipated global increase in the use of natural resources through 2050 will be attributable to an increase in consumption and production on a per capita basis, while about 30 per cent will be attributable to population growth.

10. Financial assistance for population and development has increased compared to the 1990s.

International aid for population matters declined between 2020 and 2021 but remains at a high level compared with the 1990s and early 2000s. Between 2020 and 2021, aid for sexual and reproductive health, measured in dollars per woman of reproductive age, fell by 37 per cent to USD 6.84 billion. Aid for human rights—including the support of women's institutions and movements, as well as efforts to combat violence against women and girls—has increased by 520 percent over the past two decades.



Prepared by the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA). More work of the Population Division is available at <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/>.