

The Future Can't Wait

Advancing Rights and Choices for
Current and Future Generations

Report on the Thirtieth Anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development



The United Nations
sexual and reproductive
health agency

The Future Can't Wait → Six Priorities for Action

To build a better future, all countries must reach more people with effective solutions, maximize investments and bridge divides that stall development and weaken the social fabric. ICPD30 identified six priorities to guide progress towards a people-centred future.

1 Scale up investment in individual choices and capabilities, including through sexual and reproductive healthcare, to accelerate social and economic development while avoiding demographic engineering based on targets such as fertility rates.

2 Strengthen population data systems to close gaps and meet new needs created by intersecting megatrends.

3 Aim for universal sexual and reproductive health as a matter of rights and a pathway to more robust, inclusive and resilient development.

4 Develop gender-responsive climate proofing that protects the lives and prospects of all members of society.

5 End gender-based violence so that all women and girls are safe and free to pursue better lives, societies are more peaceful and economies are more productive.

6 Leverage technology for inclusive development gains.



The 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) outlined a bold vision. Its landmark Programme of Action affirmed that people, not population targets, are the real wealth of nations. It asserted that sustainable development depends on every individual having the right to make choices about their body, life and future. The ICPD Programme of Action offered a path towards prosperity, peace and planetary balance.

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FOREWORD

It has been 30 years since the historic International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo. As we mark a momentous anniversary by assessing global progress since then, we have an opportunity to reignite the bold vision of the ICPD Programme of Action.

In seeking a world of peace, prosperity and planetary balance, the ICPD Programme of Action today remains as fresh and relevant as it was in 1994. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals depends on empowering women, achieving gender equality, and upholding the sexual and reproductive health and rights of everyone everywhere.

Since Cairo, we have witnessed profound progress, as summarized in the following report, which is based on a comprehensive global stocktaking conducted in 2024 led by the United Nations Economic Commissions and UNFPA. The notion of setting rigid population targets and applying coercive practices to reach them has largely been put to rest. We have made significant gains in sexual and reproductive health, including through improved access to contraception. Gender gaps have largely closed in education. And a new generation of public policies has emerged to support gender equality and reproductive choices, such as through family leave provisions and subsidized childcare.

Yet the review also shows how challenging global megatrends, including climate change, economic instability and conflicts, are undermining our advances. Historic shifts in population trends and emerging technologies have ushered in a complex mix of both promise and risk.

In navigating these issues, societies that are resilient and can thrive despite adversity depend more than ever on people being free to make choices most suitable to their circumstances. This includes the fundamental right to decide if and when to have children. Whether the measure is social cohesion or a robust economy, every society benefits when every person in it lives with dignity, rights and opportunities.

UNFPA reaffirms its commitment to the Programme of Action and its principles, knowing the difference it makes and how it continues to inspire our many partners around the world. Each day, we work to make it a reality, from remote villages to forums that set policy. Our firm conviction is that development centred on people and attuned to the richness of human possibilities remains the path forward.



Diene Keita
Acting Executive Director, UNFPA
United Nations Assistant Secretary-General

ICPD30

A Reflection and Recommitment to Bold Action

The thirtieth anniversary of the ICPD (ICPD30) was a moment to review progress, celebrate gains and reignite the bold vision. ICPD30 centred around people. Inclusive conversations brought together young people, parliamentarians, representatives of United Nations Member States, experts from international and regional organizations, thinkers from academia, civil society advocates, businesspeople and local government authorities.

ICPD30 Review Process



Five Regional Population Conferences: covering Africa; the Arab States; Asia and the Pacific; Europe, Central Asia and North America; and Latin America and Caribbean.



Three Global Dialogues: On youth, demographic diversity, and technology, engaging **2,500 participants** both in person and online.



Digital Campaign: Reached **18,500 young people**, fostering engagement and dialogue.



ICPD30-Related Events: A series of events covering gender justice, parliamentary action, and ICPD localization involved **7,200 participants**.

Key Milestones

Political Declaration Adopted at CPD57:

reaffirmed global commitment to the ICPD Programme of Action, charting a course for the next decade to prioritize sexual and reproductive rights and gender equality.

ICPD's Strategic **Positioning at the Summit of the Future:** reinforced ICPD's role in global discussions on sustainability, human rights and resilience, aligning its principles with future global development goals.

United Nations General Assembly Meeting to Commemorate ICPD30:

marked a historic moment where world leaders reaffirmed the ICPD's progress and committed to accelerating efforts to achieve its goals by 2030.

Gains in Health and Choices

The ICPD30 review celebrated gains in health and choices over the past 30 years.

- National population planning and healthcare systems **uphold reproductive rights and choices.**
- **Many countries have policies to reduce early pregnancy,** support birth spacing, provide parental leave and subsidize childcare.
- **Sexual health is recognized as vital to well-being.**
- **Most governments offer family planning services** and support adolescents' sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights (SRHR).
- **Modern contraception use nearly doubled since 1990.**
- **Maternal deaths decreased substantially.** Progress stalled in 2015, with inequalities across regions and population groups.
- **HIV infection rates and deaths dropped significantly,** but progress is uneven.
- **Girls and boys have equal access to primary school education in two thirds of countries.**

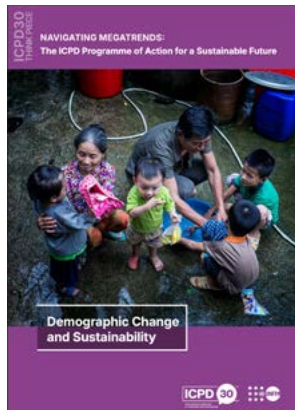


Challenges in Turbulent Times

The review also noted the obstacles and setbacks. Global crises – including the COVID-19 pandemic, climate-related disasters, conflict and economic instability – reversed progress on maternal health, strained healthcare budgets and increased the risk of gender-based violence. The rights of women and girls are being rolled back, nearly half of all pregnancies are unintended and no country has achieved gender equality. Political divides have undermined global consensus on population and development priorities. In addition, growing nationalism, widening inequalities and disinformation fuel polarization. Eroding trust in governance, dwindling support for multilateral institutions and declining funding are undermining the provision of essential services and hindering global cooperation.

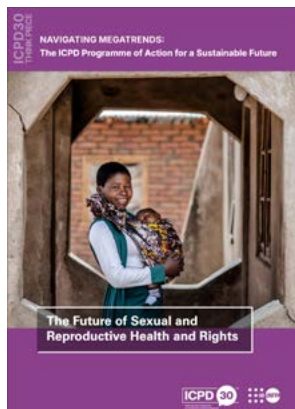
Keeping Up with the Megatrends

On the thirtieth anniversary of the ICPD, UNFPA commissioned five think pieces to explore how the Programme of Action can guide future development. These covered demographic change, SRHR, population data, climate action, and digital transformation. Together, they offer forward-looking recommendations to sustain progress on rights and choices in a rapidly evolving world.



Demographic Change and Sustainability

- Integrate demographic trends and projections – especially at subnational levels – into policies, infrastructure and service planning.
- Remove barriers to reproductive choice, including by supporting both contraception and infertility services.
- Invest in youth and promote workforce participation of women, migrants, and older persons, ensuring decent work and living wages.
- Strengthen urban design to support inclusive, sustainable and climate-resilient communities.
- Recognize and invest in the care economy, ensuring fair pay and conditions for care workers.
- Promote humane migration policies that enable safe and regular migration.



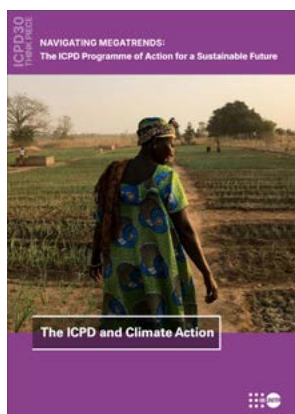
The Future of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

- Ensure universal health coverage includes high-quality, people-centred SRHR services across the life course.
- Use population analysis and integrated data systems to anticipate changing service needs.
- Prioritize comprehensive sexuality education, including quality assurance of online content and values-based curricula.
- Build alliances across sectors to uphold shared goals and resist polarization.



The Future of Population Data

- Transition to integrated data systems combining censuses, surveys and administrative data.
- Establish rights-based governance frameworks to protect data privacy and manage risks from AI use.
- Increase domestic financing for data systems and embed statistical investments across sectors.
- Strengthen capacity in the Global South, particularly through training and centres of excellence.



The ICPD and Climate Action

- Embed SRHR and gender equality in climate responses and ensure continuity of reproductive health services during disruptions.
- Strengthen climate-resilient health systems, including social protection measures.
- Involve youth in climate governance and invest in research on climate impacts on young people.
- Use geospatial mapping to guide adaptation and preparedness strategies.
- Support safe, inclusive migration for people displaced by climate and environmental degradation.
- Advance green urban planning and promote sustainable consumption and production models.



A Safe Digital Future

- Ensure safety-by-design through standards, consent mechanisms, and support for diverse technology leadership.
- Promote rights-based technology governance and transparent business models that protect user privacy.
- Regulate harmful content, protect personal data and hold digital platforms accountable.
- Invest in proactive tools, partnerships and education to build digital resilience across all groups.

“We have an opportunity to take forward the conversation ... reaffirming the need to embrace demographic diversity as not merely a moral imperative but a strategic necessity for achieving inclusive and sustainable development goals and the transformative vision of the ICPD Programme of Action in placing individuals’ rights and choices at the centre of development.”

Diene Keita, Deputy Executive Director (Programme), (now Acting Executive Director) UNFPA
at the ICPD30 Talk on Demographic Diversity

Five regional population conferences hosted by the United Nations regional economic and social commissions in 2023, captured distinct trends, concerns and innovations in Africa, the Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Central Asia and North America, and Latin America and the Caribbean.



73.7
years

Global life expectancy
in 2024, up from
64.5 years in 1994.

972
million

The number of
women aged 15–49 using
contraception (up from
592 million in 1990).

$\frac{2}{3}$

of countries have
reached gender parity
in primary school.



Regional Reviews and Conferences

Shared Priorities across Regions

Across all regional reviews, several themes consistently emerged:

- **Universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights** remains a cornerstone of sustainable development and gender equality. Barriers to care must be addressed across all life stages.
- **Ending gender-based violence** requires legal reforms and norm change, including engaging men and boys and addressing technology-facilitated gender-based violence.
- **Maternal health disparities** persist, especially across rural and marginalized communities, requiring comprehensive, equitable care systems.
- **Adolescent pregnancy** continues to undermine girls' rights and futures, pointing to the need for youth-friendly SRH services and holistic support for young mothers.
- **Girls' education** is derailed by early marriage and pregnancy. Proven strategies include compulsory education, sexuality education and measures to reduce unpaid care burdens.
- **HIV prevention** must expand with youth-centred services, anti-stigma efforts and broader testing access.
- **Crisis resilience** is essential. Gender-responsive health systems and SRHR services – including in humanitarian settings – must be sustained through climate, migration and disaster shocks.

The Arab Region

The sixth review of the International Conference on Population and Development

Ten years after the Cairo Declaration, the Arab region conducted its sixth ICPD review, led by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the League of Arab States (LAS) and UNFPA. The review emphasized inclusive governance, rights and resilience in response to regional challenges.

Closing session of the Arab Regional Conference on Population and Development, 14 September 2023: Dr. Natalia Kanem, Executive Director, UNFPA; Chouaa Dassouki, Director, Population Policies Department, League of Arab States; Fadoua Bakhadda, Regional Director, International Planned Parenthood Federation Arab World Regional Office; Laila Baker, Regional Director, Arab States, UNFPA; and Mehrinaz El Awady, Director, Gender Justice, Population and Inclusive Development Cluster, ESCWA.



Government officials, parliamentarians, representatives of national human rights institutions, regional organizations, civil society organizations and young people participated in the Arab Regional Conference on Population and Development on 13 and 14 September 2023 in Beirut, Lebanon.

Key Recommendations

Governance, Rights & Financing

- Mainstream rights-based and inclusive approaches across population and development policies.
- Strengthen governance systems, participatory processes and accountability mechanisms.
- Increase fiscal space to build institutional capacities, develop effective policy frameworks and coordinate cross-sectoral implementation.
- Promote social justice and enhance system resilience to climate change and crises.

Gender Equality & Sexual and Reproductive Health and Reproductive Rights

- Expand access to sexual and reproductive health services within universal health coverage using a life-course approach.
- Enact and implement laws to eliminate gender discrimination and gender-based violence.
- Ensure women's empowerment and gender mainstreaming in national strategies.

Data & Evidence

- Invest in data systems and research to support evidence-based policymaking.
- Enhance analytical capacity to monitor progress across ICPD and Cairo Declaration commitments.

Regional Cooperation

- Foster dialogue, cooperation, and peer learning to address shared challenges such as displacement, food insecurity and climate change.

→ The UNECE Region

Ensuring rights and choices amid demographic change

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) with UNFPA support led the ICPD30 review in the UNECE region, covering 56 Member States in Europe, Central Asia and North America. The review assessed implementation of the Programme of Action and the recommendations of the 2013 Chair's Summary of the UNECE Regional Conference on the ICPD beyond 2014. Several UNECE Member States reaffirmed their commitment to the ICPD principles and to implementing its Programme of Action and related frameworks.

Alexei Buzu, Minister of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Moldova and co-Chair of the ICPD30 Regional Conference of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region addressing participants in Geneva, Switzerland on 20 October 2023.



Opening of the UNECE Regional Conference on ICPD30, Geneva, Switzerland, 20 October 2023: Lisa Warth, Chief, Population Unit, UNECE; Tatiana Molcean, Executive Secretary, UNECE; Aurora Díaz-Rato Revuelta, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Spain to the UN in Geneva and Co-Chair; Alexei Buzu, Minister of Labour and Social Protection, Republic of Moldova, and Co-Chair; Diene Keita, Deputy Executive Director (Programme), UNFPA; and Florence Bauer, Regional Director, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, UNFPA.

Key Recommendations

Demographic Resilience & Policy Innovation

- Design policies based on population dynamics that invest in individual potential, gender equality and capabilities across the life course.
- Support work–life balance and realization of fertility intentions.
- Address youth unemployment while encouraging productive ageing.
- Governments should also invest in long-term care systems to ensure dignified ageing, particularly as demographic transitions accelerate.

Gender Equality & Sexual and Reproductive Health and Reproductive Rights

- Eliminate harmful gender norms and violence through investments in empowerment and rights.
- Ensure access to contraception, respectful maternity care and comprehensive sexuality education.
- Train teachers and healthcare professionals to deliver rights-based SRHR services and comprehensive sexuality education.

Social Inclusion & Equal Opportunity

- Implement policies to promote inclusion, flexible work, gender-balanced leadership, and equal pay.
- Combat all forms of discrimination, particularly against women, older persons, migrants and marginalized groups.

Data & Evidence

- Close data gaps through collaboration among national statistical offices and research institutions.
- Invest in inclusive, disaggregated data for informed policymaking and sustainable development.

Climate Action & Sustainability

- Advance integrated climate and development strategies in line with the Paris Agreement and 2050 net-zero targets.

→ Africa

The 10-year review of the Addis Ababa Declaration on Population and Development

African ministers adopted the Addis Ababa Declaration on Population and Development (AADPD) in 2013 as a comprehensive framework for addressing population and development issues on the African continent. The 10-year review of its implementation was led by the African Union Commission, with the support of the Economic Commission for Africa and UNFPA. The review assessed progress in realizing the 88 AADPD commitments and the demographic dividend. African Union Member States underscored the relevance and significance of the ICPD Programme of Action in Africa for achieving Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda, considering global megatrends.



Ministerial Segment of the African Population Experts Committee and Ministers in Charge of Population, Lusaka, Zambia, 9 November 2023: Julio Rakotorinina, Director, Department of Health and Humanitarian Affairs, African Union Commission; Dr. Samuel Roger Kamba, Minister of Health, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Chair of the Specialized Technical Committee on Health, Population and Drug Control; W.K. Nalumango, Vice President, Republic of Zambia; Diene Keita, Deputy Executive Director (Programme), UNFPA; Lois Mulube, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Finance and National Planning, Republic of Zambia; and Oliver Chinganya, Director, Africa Centre for Statistics, UNECA, together with population ministers and experts.

Key Recommendations

Dignity, Equality & Governance

- Reduce poverty and inequalities, especially in rural areas.
- Promote gender equality in education and leadership.
- Strengthen governance, the rule of law, and inclusive policymaking.

Health & Sexual and Reproductive Health and Reproductive Rights

- Increase health budgets to 15% of national expenditure and 5% of GDP.
- Expand health insurance and address infectious diseases.
- Engage adolescents and youth in health decision-making.

Migration, Climate & Urbanization

- Strengthen migration governance and urban planning to prevent slums.
- Integrate climate adaptation into environmental and crisis response policies.

Data & Innovation

- Build national statistical systems and integrate demographic foresight.
- Promote regional cooperation in big data and artificial intelligence (AI) for decision-making.

Partnerships

- Build capacities of civil society, youth groups and the private sector.
- Strengthen South–South partnerships and accelerate the African Continental Free Trade Area.

Financing & Accountability

- Mobilize domestic resources and establish budget tracking for population programmes.

→ Asia and the Pacific

10 years of the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development

The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) with UNFPA convened the review of implementation of the 2013 Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development and the ICPD Programme of Action in the region with national reports from 22 countries, enriched by academic and civil society contributions. ESCAP Member States reaffirmed their commitment to a people-centred, rights-based, gender-sensitive and inclusive approach to implementing the population and development agenda in the region.

The representative of Timor-Leste made a statement during the thematic discussion on achievements, challenges, gaps and emerging issues related to population dynamics, sustainable development and climate change.



Opening ceremony of the seventh Asia and Pacific Population Conference in Bangkok on 15 November 2023 (left to right): Dr. Eselealofa Apinelu, Tuvalu High Commissioner to Fiji and second Vice Chair of the Conference; Laisa Bulatale, Fiji Women's Rights Movement; Diene Keita, Deputy Executive Director (Programme), UNFPA; Varawut Silpa-archa, Minister of Social Development and Human Security, Thailand and Chair of the Conference; Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Executive Secretary, ESCAP; Lisa Grace Bersales, Head, Philippine Statistics Authority and Vice Chair; Sangay Dechen Gyanzo, Y-Peer, Bhutan; and Srinivas Tata, Director, Social Development Division, ESCAP.

Key Recommendations

Rights-based, People-centred Development

- Apply a holistic and gender-sensitive life-course approach to development.
- Foster intergenerational solidarity and long-term planning for ageing societies.

Health & Social Protection

- Ensure universal, community-based, person-centred healthcare including SRHR.
- Address health determinants, invest in health promotion, and support caregivers.
- Provide universal social protection over the life course.

Decent Work & Gender Equality

- Create inclusive labour markets with flexible work environments.
- Promote gender equality through legal reform, budgeting and women's empowerment.

Climate Resilience & Low-carbon Development

- Mainstream climate adaptation and mitigation into national development plans.

Participation & Cooperation

- Enable civil society participation and create safe spaces for dialogue.
- Promote South-South and triangular cooperation, sharing successful practices.

Implementation & Financing

- Allocate sufficient resources for full APMD implementation and designate high-level national focal points.

Latin America and the Caribbean

10 years of the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) with UNFPA support, led the regional ICPD30 review through voluntary national reports from 22 Member States. The draft second regional report was informed by additional sources, including regional and UN reports, academic research and civil society contributions. Government and civil society representatives reaffirmed their commitment and called for redoubling of efforts to fully implement the Consensus.



Elizabeth Taylor Jay, Vice-Minister for Multilateral Affairs of Colombia speaking during the high-level panel discussion on “Challenges of scaling up implementation in Latin America and the Caribbean of the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development, 10 years after its adoption”.



Closing of the Fifth Meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Population and Development, Santiago de Chile, 15 November 2023: Simone Cecchini, Chief, the Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Centre, Population Division, ECLAC; José Manuel Salazar-Xirinachs, Executive Secretary, ECLAC; Carlos David Guachalla, Deputy Minister of Development Planning of the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Chair; Luis Yáñez, Secretary of the Commission, ECLAC; and Susana Sottoli, Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean, UNFPA.

Key Recommendations

Human Rights & Inclusion

- Apply a human rights-based approach with gender, intercultural and intersectional perspectives.
- Address structural racism and discrimination, particularly impacting Indigenous and Afrodescendant communities, including recognition of the rights of uncontacted and endangered Indigenous peoples whose protection is critical in fragile and remote areas.

Health & Sexual and Reproductive Health and Reproductive Rights

- Strengthen resilient, primary-level health systems with integrated SRHR services.
- Expand preventive care and social protection to reduce crisis vulnerability.

Migration & Youth

- Use migration data to guide evidence-based policies and uphold migrant rights.
- Invest in youth empowerment through education, decent work and prevention of early marriage and unintended pregnancies.

Crisis & Climate Response

- Develop frameworks to manage displacement due to climate disasters.
- Strengthen regional coordination for labour mobility and climate migration.

Older Persons & Community Participation

- Empower older persons and include them in humanitarian responses and community initiatives.

Global Dialogues on the Future of Population and Development

As part of the ICPD30 review, three global dialogues brought together diverse voices to address future challenges and opportunities related to youth, demographic diversity and technology. Over 2,500 participants engaged in person and online, generating innovative ideas to advance the ICPD agenda in a changing world.

→ Youth Dialogue: Charting a Youth-centred Future

This dialogue affirmed that young people are not just beneficiaries but vital partners in shaping the future. Participants called for their **meaningful participation** in decision-making, as well as **investment in youth-led solutions** that address their lived realities. Recommendations included:

- Universal access to **youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services** and **comprehensive sexuality education**.
- **Stronger support for youth-led organizations** and accountability mechanisms.
- **Inclusion of young people in humanitarian response and climate governance**.

→ Dialogue on Demographic Diversity and Sustainable Development: Opportunities in an Age of Population Change

This dialogue emphasized that demographic change – whether ageing, low fertility, or youth bulges – is not a crisis, but a call to invest in people. To respond to demographic diversity, countries must develop rights-based, inclusive policies and reframe ageing and migration as opportunities. Priorities included:

- Investing in people's **capabilities across the life course**.
- Building **inclusive labour markets** and **care systems** that respond to changing population dynamics.
- Strengthening **intergenerational solidarity** and social cohesion.

→ Dialogue on Technology and Rights: a Digital Future that Works for All

This dialogue explored how digital transformation can both accelerate and endanger progress on rights and choices. Participants called for greater accountability in digital governance and proactive investment in digital inclusion. Recommendations included:

- Closing the **gender digital divide** and improving **digital literacy** across all age groups.
- Establishing **rights-based regulatory frameworks** to ensure privacy, prevent harm, and address **technology-facilitated gender-based violence**.
- Promoting **ethical and inclusive AI** and technology systems that prioritize safety-by-design and human rights.

Together, these global dialogues enriched the ICPD30 review with **forward-looking, rights-based insights** that complement regional findings and point to a people-centred future grounded in inclusion, equity and innovation.

The Road Ahead: Partnership and Common Ground

ICPD30 reaffirmed that broad-based partnerships are essential to realizing people-centred development. Governments, civil society organizations, youth activists, women's groups, parliamentarians, researchers and the private sector all have vital roles to play in delivering on the promise of rights and choices for all.

The ICPD30 review underscored the shared value of investing in people: healthy, empowered and resilient populations drive progress for societies, economies and the planet.

As we look to the future, it is this spirit of collaboration – grounded in shared values and mutual benefit – that will sustain momentum and accelerate action. Advancing health, rights and choices for every generation is not only possible, it is imperative.

The future can't wait.



Towards a People-centred Future

The global community supports the ICPD commitments because they build inclusive, peaceful and prosperous societies. Expanding human capabilities, rights and choices – especially sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights – helps societies thrive. These rights underpin bodily autonomy and drive progress in education, employment and leadership for individuals, families and countries.

But the future can't wait. Delivering on the ICPD promise requires renewed urgency, bold partnerships and unwavering commitment. Now is the time to act – for every person, in every generation.



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