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UNFPA – Annual report of the Executive Director

United Nations Population Fund

Integrated midterm review and progress report on the implementation of the UNFPA strategic plan, 2022-2025

Report of the Executive Director

Summary

The 2023 annual report of the UNFPA Executive Director on progress in implementing the UNFPA strategic plan, 2022-2025, incorporates the midterm review of the strategic plan. It should be read in conjunction with the statistical and financial review, 2023 [DP/FPA/2024/4 (Part I)/Add.1], which provides details of UNFPA expenditures, and the midterm review of the UNFPA integrated budget, 2022-2025 (DP/FPA/2024/3).

The report shows that by the midpoint of the strategic plan period, UNFPA generated the momentum necessary to accelerate the achievement of the three transformative results of its strategic plan and to scale up the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. The report also takes stock of the challenges encountered and lessons learned. The annexes to the report, available on the UNFPA Executive Board website, provide detailed analyses and information on the progress achieved.

Elements of a decision

The Executive Board may wish to:

- (a) Note with appreciation the progress made by UNFPA in achieving the results of the UNFPA strategic plan, 2022-2025, as recorded during the first two years of its implementation;
- (b) Approve the proposed adjustments to the UNFPA strategic plan, 2022-2025, based on the findings of the midterm review, as contained in DP/FPA/2024/4 (Part 1) and annex 1.

Note: The present document was processed in its entirety by UNFPA.

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The annexes to this report are available on the [UNFPA Executive Board website](#).

I. Overview

1. This report analyses the progress made in achieving the results of the UNFPA strategic plan, 2022-2025, at the midpoint of the strategic plan period. It also analyses the organization's implementation readiness and execution of its strategic plan and recommends remedial measures to improve performance further.
2. The goal of the UNFPA strategic plan, 2022-2025, is to achieve universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, and to accelerate the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). The UNFPA strategic plan, 2022-2025, is the second of three consecutive strategic plans designed to enable UNFPA to contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (hereafter referred to as the 2030 Agenda). The subsequent strategic plan will cover 2026-2029.
3. The strategic plan, 2022-2025, focuses on accelerating the achievement of three transformative results: (a) ending the unmet need for family planning; (b) ending preventable maternal deaths; and (c) ending gender-based violence and all harmful practices, including female genital mutilation and child, early and forced marriage. It defines six interconnected outputs and six accelerators as the pathways to acceleration. It also defines key shifts in implementation approaches in order to transform UNFPA from doing "business as usual" to becoming "fit-for-purpose" to drive the acceleration. The plan is also a "Call to Action" to all partners at the global, regional and country levels to contribute to collectively achieve the transformative results.
4. The world has made significant advancements since the adoption of the ICPD Programme of Action in 1994 in Cairo, Egypt (see box below). The ICPD Programme of Action has played a catalytic role in advancing the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and the three transformative results.

Achievements since the adoption of the ICPD Programme of Action in 1994

- Since 2000, the proportion of the global employed population below the international poverty line has decreased by over 75 per cent;
- Today, the number of women dying from preventable complications of pregnancy and childbirth has declined by one third since 2000;
- Since 2000, the number of girls giving birth while still teenagers has dropped by a third;
- Since 1990, the number of women using modern contraceptives has doubled;
- Since 1994, the unmet need for family planning for any method has decreased by 20 per cent worldwide;
- Between 2000 and 2022, the ratio of births attended by skilled health personnel has increased by 41 per cent;
- Between 2000 and 2021, the estimated HIV global incidence rate has declined from 0.49 to 0.19;
- Between 2000 and 2021, the coverage of essential health services increased globally by 51 per cent.
- Between 2001 and 2021, female genital mutilation has reduced by 21 per cent in Northern Africa.

5. Global-level advancements in achieving the three transformative results have recently stalled, however, primarily because of distress factors, including polycrises and their social and economic disruptions; resistance in some quarters against sexual and reproductive health initiatives and reproductive rights; and worsening inequalities and inequities (especially those who are affected by vulnerabilities owing to disability, racism, xenophobia, sexual orientation and gender identity, ethnicity or residency status).
6. Ending the unmet need for family planning and ending preventable maternal deaths has stagnated since 2015. As a result, the world is now significantly off-track to achieve the three transformative results by 2030 and the 2030 Agenda. In order to achieve the three transformative results and the 2030 Agenda, greater efforts must be made.
7. Although overall global trends have stagnated, UNFPA nevertheless achieved its strategic plan outputs, which, in turn, contributed to avoiding a further regression of progress in achieving the three transformative results.
8. UNFPA contributes to progress towards achieving the three transformative results. From its work on procurement of reproductive health supplies alone, UNFPA contributed to averting approximately 10 per cent of preventable maternal deaths per year, as well as about 15 million unintended pregnancies per year. In 2022 and 2023, UNFPA-supported programmes ensured over 1 million safe deliveries in humanitarian-

affected countries per year. The impact of UNFPA is even more significant, considering its work in changing policy, strengthening systems, and changing discriminative gender and social norms at the global, regional and national levels. Without the contributions of UNFPA, the global situation would be much worse.

9. Figure 1 below highlights the key results achieved during the first two years of the implementation of the strategic plan.

Figure 1
Key results achieved during 2022-2023 in UNFPA programme countries



*Estimated results modeled on UNFPA procurement of family planning commodities

10. UNFPA continued to play a leading role in population and sustainable development efforts by harnessing the power of data and population dynamics. UNFPA efforts contributed to the following results:

- From 2013 to 2022, 156 countries had conducted at least one population and housing census;
- According to the latest data, 60.4 per cent of countries had birth registration data that was at least 90 per cent complete;
- As of 2022, 77.2 per cent of births of children under 5 years of age were registered with a civil authority.

11. The midterm review of UNFPA readiness and the execution of its strategic plan found areas of strength upon which to build. These included the organization's strong alignment with the strategic direction of its strategic plan through, among other things, its programming and normative engagements at global, regional and country levels, with a clear focus on leaving no one behind, expanding the humanitarian response and preparedness capacity; invigorating and developing partnerships to realize the Call to Action to contribute to achieving the transformative results; tailoring programmatic and technical assistance to local contexts; increasingly leveraging the United Nations reform to improve organizational performance and advancement of the normative work.

12. The midterm review also identified gaps and challenges. These included the need for strengthened country office capacity for addressing discriminative gender and social norms, for addressing challenges arising from changing population dynamics, for implementing the shift from funding to funding *and* financing for the three transformative results and the ICPD agenda, and for integrating the global megatrends into sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights programming. There were also some challenges regarding knowledge management within UNFPA, the availability and use of high-quality population data, and increased prioritization of the normative role of UNFPA, particularly in the context of opposition to and deprioritization of some elements of the ICPD agenda.

13. The midterm review recommended six remedial priorities to improve its readiness and the execution of its strategic plan, also in line with the United Nations Secretary-General's UN 2.0 Quintet of Change:

- (a) Enhancing further the normative role of UNFPA by utilizing more and stronger evidence for advocacy and policy dialogue, strengthening the normative capacity of leadership at all levels of the organization, and strengthening strategic partnerships to advocate for all elements of the ICPD agenda more effectively;
- (b) Investing further in eliminating discriminatory gender and social norms by strengthening staff capacity in gender-transformative and behavioural change programming and by designing and deploying innovative and impactful interventions to change the gender and social norms;
- (c) Sharpening the UNFPA narrative on the criticality of the three transformative results to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals everywhere, including in middle-income countries and in low fertility and population ageing contexts;
- (d) Investing in financing for the ICPD agenda by increasing staff knowledge, skills and capacity to explore and leverage financing opportunities from international and domestic public and private resources;
- (e) Developing additional capacity in data analytics and foresight to better design and effectively implement future-informed and high-quality programmes;
- (f) Optimizing and systematizing knowledge management.

14. UNFPA will also consolidate progress and strengthen preparedness and complementarity among its interventions in humanitarian, development and peace contexts. The movement toward peace will be hastened when women and girls have a voice and have choices, and when they can fully and freely exercise their human rights.

15. UNFPA has undertaken organizational changes to be better able to accelerate the achievement of the three transformative results and the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action. These organizational adjustments include:

- (a) An UNFPA headquarters optimization process merging the strategy and programme functions with technical functions of the organization to reinvigorate, reimagine and transform UNFPA to make sure that UNFPA is future-fit and strategically positioned to deliver on its mandate. This includes the following elements:
 - (i) The Policy and Strategy Division and the Technical Division will be merged, and the new division will be named the Programme Division. The majority of the functions of this merged division will be moved from New York and other locations to Nairobi, Kenya by September 2025;
 - (ii) Establish a Data and Analytics Branch within the new Programme Division; a dedicated knowledge management team and a financing team within the Quality Programming Branch; and a dedicated foresight team within the Strategic Planning Branch;

- (iii) The integration of the Intergovernmental, Inter-Agency and Policy Dialogue Branch of the current Policy and Strategy Division into the Division of Communications and Strategic Partnerships, which will stay in New York;
 - (iv) The establishment of a new Programme Liaison Branch, which will function in New York to support the implementation of normative functions and technical and representational functions;
 - (v) The relocation of the Independent Evaluation Office from New York to Nairobi, Kenya;
- (b) The realignment of the Supply Chain Management Unit to strengthen: (i) demand and supply elements of family planning; (ii) logistics management; (iii) product quality assurance; (iv) risk management; and (v) communications, to ensure that life-saving reproductive health products more effectively and efficiently reach those in need;
 - (c) The realignment of the Office of the Security Coordinator to ensure that the Office is suited to support an increased UNFPA global footprint in humanitarian and crisis contexts.
16. UNFPA will also undertake a number of actions to operationalize the priorities of the midterm review. UNFPA will, inter alia:
- (a) Implement the newly approved financing for ICPD strategy;
 - (b) Launch an exploratory study to assess the likely future demands of UNFPA by 2030 and beyond, and its potential implications on the business model;
 - (c) Implement the newly launched UNFPA knowledge management strategy, 2024-2030 to deliver knowledge and solutions to UNFPA personnel at the time and in the format they need them;
 - (d) Finalize and implement the UNFPA innovation strategy to strengthen and streamline commitments of UNFPA to support innovations; and
 - (e) Update the UNFPA integrated budget, 2022-2025, the integrated results and resources framework of the UNFPA strategic plan, 2022-2025, as well as the global and regional programmes of UNFPA, to reflect the midterm adjustments. UNFPA has determined that the theory of change to achieve the three transformative results and the 2030 Agenda remains valid for the second half of the UNFPA strategic plan, 2022-2025.
17. These adjustments are mainstreamed throughout this report and highlighted in section IV.

II. Context

18. Humanity has reached a crossroads. The world is now confronted with polycrises. Conflicts, the threats of climate change and food insecurity, as well as the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, have caused deeper and increasingly complex health emergencies.

19. By May 2023, the devastating consequences of war, conflict and human rights violations had displaced a staggering 110 million people, of which 35 million were refugees – the highest figures ever recorded.

20. The year 2023 marked the midpoint of the implementation of the UNFPA strategic plan, 2022-2025, and the 2030 Agenda. That year, UNFPA also began the review process to commemorate the 30-year anniversary of the adoption of the ICPD Programme of Action.

21. While developed economies have largely bounced back from the COVID-19 pandemic, many developing economies have lost ground. More than half the world's poorest countries (75 of which are UNFPA programme countries) faced debt distress and struggled to commit resources for sexual and reproductive health and rights.

22. The year 2023 was also the warmest year on record. Many of the countries battered by debt burdens are also vulnerable to the negative effects of rapid climate change. UNFPA research indicated that countries most at risk of climate change are also those where women and girls are in greatest danger of maternal mortality, intimate partner violence, and child marriage and pregnancy.

23. By 2022, foreign aid from the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development rose to an all-time high of \$211 billion, a 17 per cent increase in real terms from 2021. However, most of this increase accounted for spending on processing and hosting refugees, especially from the conflict in Ukraine; it was not directed towards development initiatives in general, or

towards sexual and reproductive health programmes in particular. For instance, in 2022, less than 1 per cent of global aid and development spending targeted gender-based violence.

24. Despite arriving at the midway point to the 2030 Agenda, resources for gender equality programming remain inadequate. Only 4 per cent of total bilateral aid is dedicated to programmes where gender equality is the principal objective.

25. Since 2018, the UNFPA humanitarian appeal has tripled, from \$463 million to \$1.2 billion. However, 2023 was the first year since 2010-2011 in which global humanitarian funding declined, compared to the previous year.

26. Human rights are under stress around the world. Inequalities are deepening. Women's rights are stalling, and in some cases, regressing. Civic space and media freedom are being rolled back. During 2023, almost 450 human rights defenders, journalists and trade unionists were killed –40 per cent more than in 2022.

27. The hard-earned progress towards achieving universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, and the Sustainable Development Goals, is now at risk. Conflicts continue to divert attention and resources, and further erode cooperation in the global community. Progress on more than 50 per cent of the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals is weak and insufficient; for 30 per cent of the targets, progress has stalled or has reversed. These targets include those on poverty, hunger and climate. Unless the global community acts now, the promise of the 2030 Agenda will not be achieved.

28. Yet 2023 was a transformative year in the fields of technology and innovation, from the rise of artificial intelligence to the metaverse, including artificial intelligence-enabled sexual and reproductive health service delivery.

29. The world continued to undergo demographic shifts. In 2022, the world population reached 8 billion people, a milestone in human development. In 2023, India surpassed China as the world's most populous country.

30. Efforts in 2022 and 2023 to increase access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights witnessed several important milestones. In 2023, the World Health Organization officially declared the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition:

- (a) In 2022, the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 76/306, which builds on the work of the Secretary-General's Envoys on Youth to establish the first United Nations Youth Office. In response – and to further accelerate the implementation of My Body, My Life, My World, a new global strategy to support advocacy for bodily autonomy and the rights and choices of all adolescents and youth –UNFPA launched its Operational Guidance in 2022.
- (b) Heads of State and Government and high-level representatives met in New York in September 2023 at the Sustainable Development Goals Summit to review progress and accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The Summit adopted a political declaration that provides a road map to accelerate the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. In line with the roadmap, the UNFPA midterm review recommended remedial measures to increase UNFPA capacity to contribute to accelerating progress toward the three transformative results: the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action and the Sustainable Development Goals.
- (c) In 2023, global health issues were brought to the forefront during the high-level week of the General Assembly, with three high-level meetings held on strengthening pandemic prevention, preparedness and response; achieving universal health coverage; and ending the global tuberculosis epidemic.
- (d) The global community made key commitments towards climate action at the twenty-eighth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change that are critical for women and young people.
- (e) UNFPA played a pivotal role in the second African Union International Conference on Female Genital Mutilation, held from 9 to 11 October 2023 in Dar es Salaam, United Republic of Tanzania. The Conference adopted an outcome document to accelerate action towards the elimination of female genital mutilation;
- (f) In 2023, five regional population conferences were held in preparation for the 30-year anniversary of the adoption of the ICPD Programme of Action. In addition, more than 100 national ICPD country reports were formulated in 2023. UNFPA also conducted a number of other advocacy events and dialogues on the ICPD Programme of Action.

31. In September 2024, the United Nations will host the Summit of the Future. The Summit will seek to strengthen multilateralism and advance reforms towards a more fair, equitable and inclusive international financial system. It will also seek to accelerate efforts to meet existing international commitments and take steps to respond to emerging challenges and opportunities.

III. Results achieved

A. Achievement of the strategic plan outcomes

32. The midterm review found that at the global level, overall, the current pace of acceleration remains inadequate to achieve the three transformative results by 2030. Only a handful of countries have acceleration rates, if maintained, to achieve the transformation results. The factors hindering acceleration include humanitarian crises and their adverse impact on inequalities and health systems, discriminative gender and social norms, inadequate policy and legal frameworks, and absence of data and evidence to guide interventions.

Outcome 1. By 2025, the reduction in the unmet need for family planning has accelerated

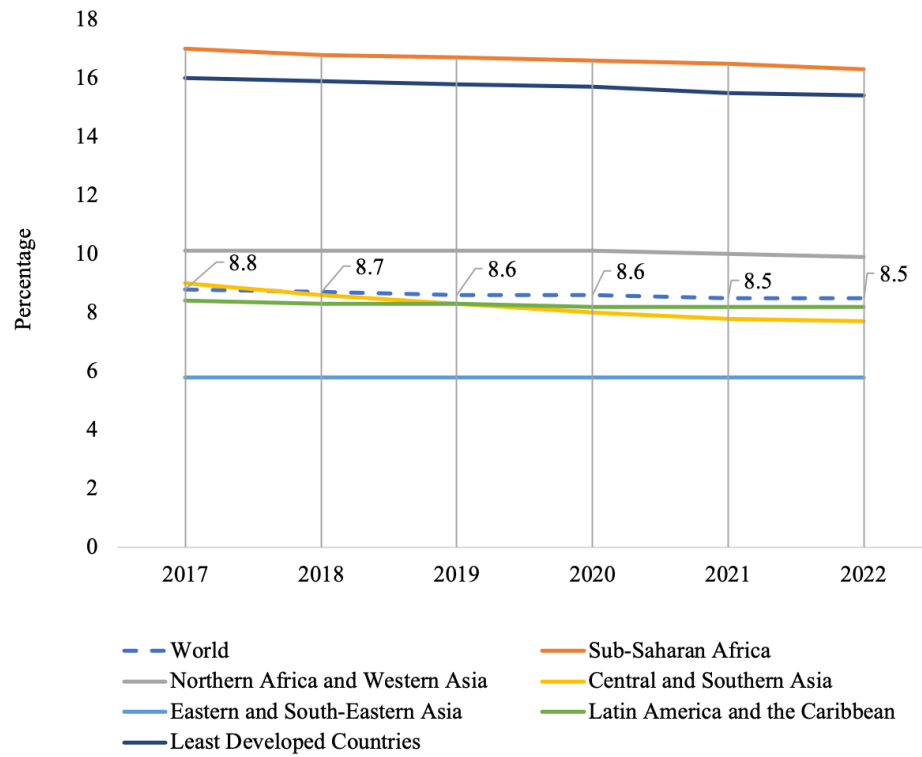
33. Globally, among 1.9 billion women of reproductive age (15-49 years), an estimated 874 million women use a modern contraceptive method.

34. The unmet need for family planning for any method decreased by 20 per cent worldwide since the adoption of the ICPD Programme of Action in 1994. With regard to the least developed countries, primarily the UNFPA programme countries, the unmet need for family planning for any method decreased by 28 per cent during the same period. However, since 2021, the world's unmet need for family planning for any method has stagnated at 8.5 per cent (see figure 2).

35. Between 2017 and 2023, Central and Southern Asia reported the highest rate of decline at the regional level with regard to the unmet need for family planning. Since 2017, the countries included in the UNFPA Supplies Partnership (48 countries with the highest rates of unmet need for family planning), reduced their collective unmet need by 5 per cent, reinforcing the importance of this programme for accelerating towards achievement of the transformative results.

36. The slow pace in reducing the unmet need for family planning can be attributed to a number of factors, including: (a) population growth, which increases the number of women of reproductive age; (b) limited access to and choice of contraceptives, especially in low-income countries; (c) cultural, religious and social norms; (d) gender inequalities that limited women's autonomy regarding their reproductive choices; (e) the lack of favourable legal frameworks; and (f) the COVID-19 pandemic.

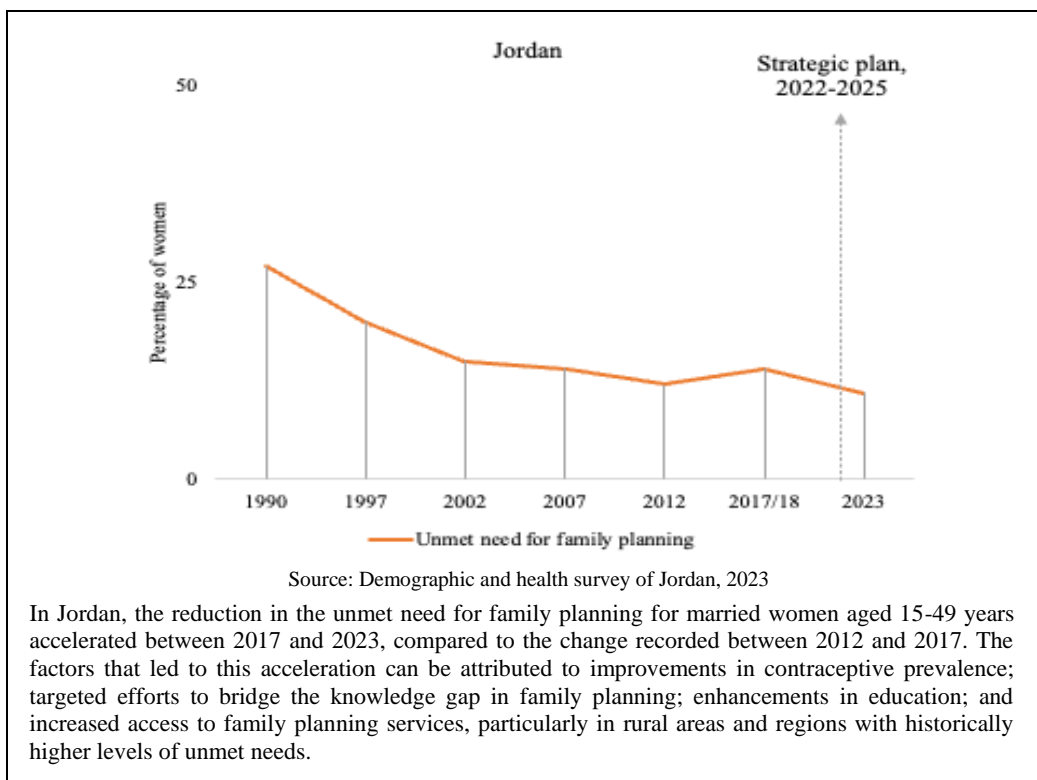
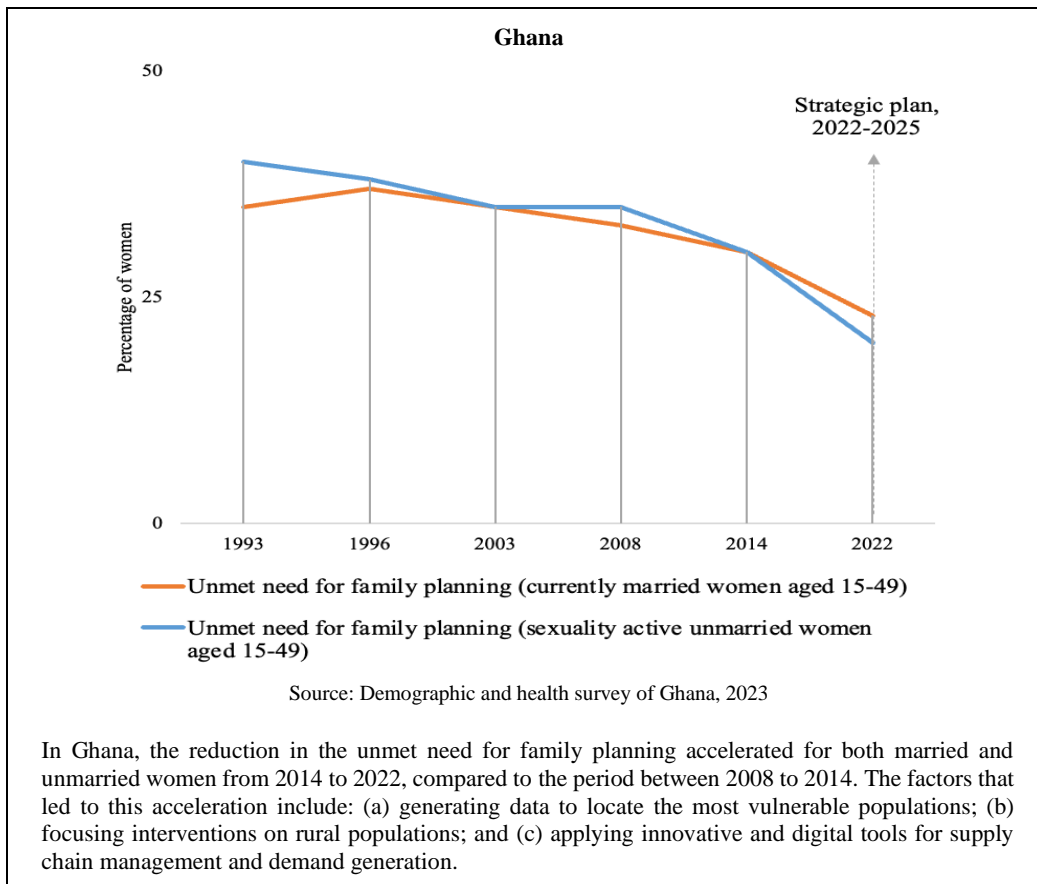
Figure 2
Percentage of women of reproductive age who have an unmet need for family planning, 2017-2022

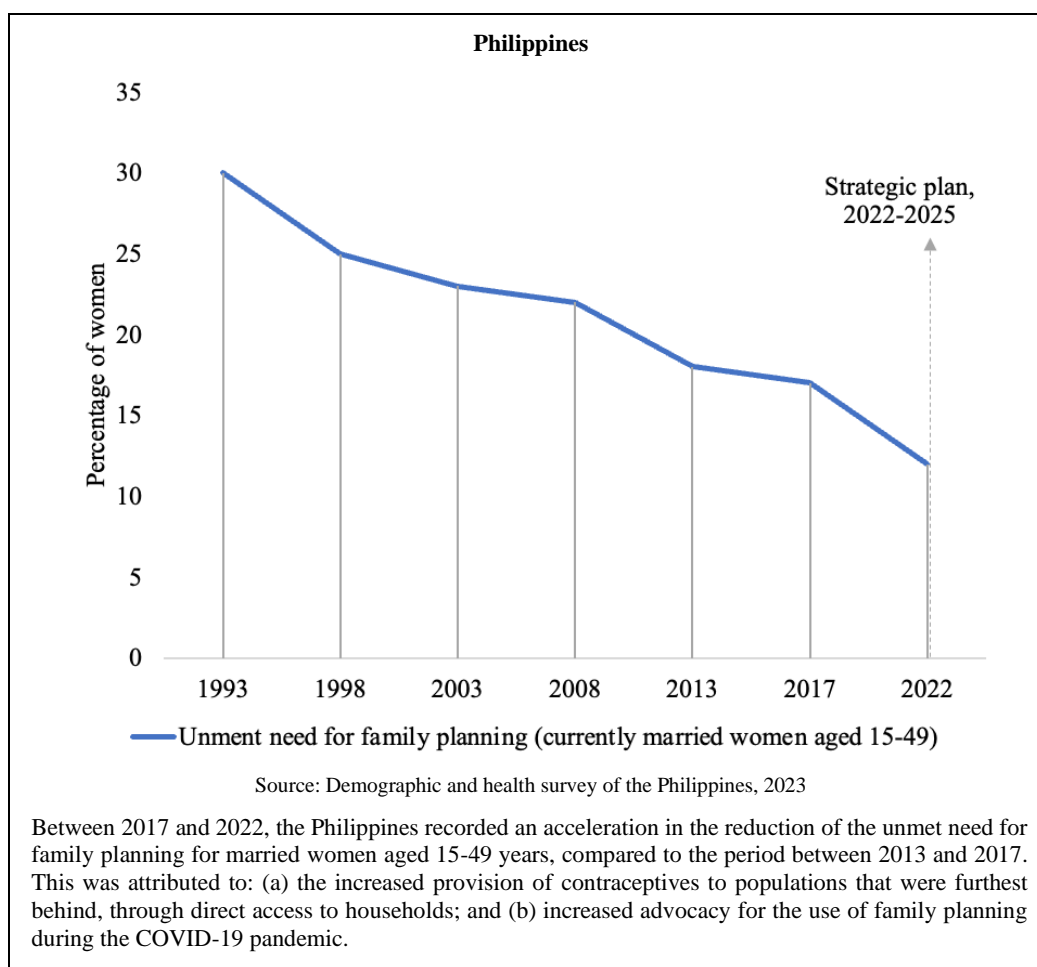


Source: *Estimates and Projections of Family Planning Indicators, 2022*. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations

37. The midterm review found that several countries, including those three shown in figure 3 below, made progress in accelerating the reduction in the unmet need for family planning.

Figure 3
Examples of country acceleration in reducing the unmet need for family planning





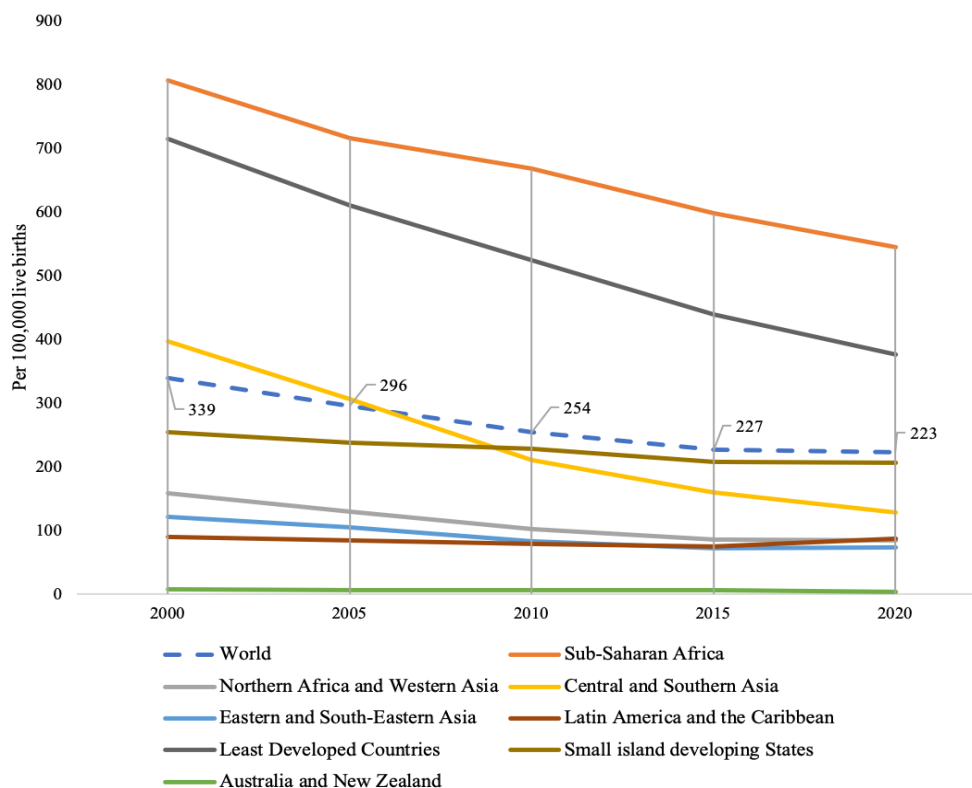
Outcome 2. By 2025, the reduction of preventable maternal deaths has accelerated

38. Between 2000 and 2020, the global maternal mortality ratio declined by 34 per cent. Though there was significant progress in reducing global maternal mortality between 2000 and 2015, progress stagnated between 2016 and 2022.

39. Maternal mortality estimates show variations among regions. From 2000 to 2015, maternal mortality declined significantly in all regions. From 2016 to 2020, maternal mortality stagnated in most regions, except in Australia and New Zealand and in Central and Southern Asia. Maternal mortality increased in Europe and North America, and in Latin America and the Caribbean.

40. In the least developed countries, the pace of decline was significant, with an average annual reduction in maternal mortality of 2.8 per cent.

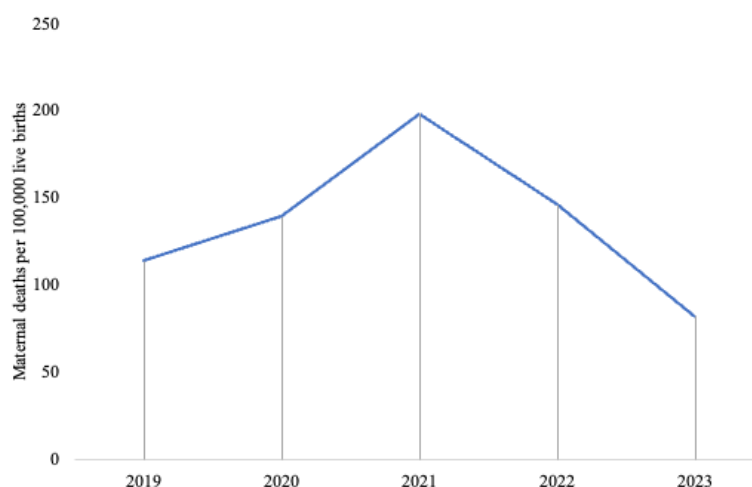
Figure 4
Trends in maternal mortality, 2000-2020



Source: *Trends in maternal mortality 2000 to 2020*. United Nations

41. By 2023, several countries introduced initiatives to scale up the reduction of maternal deaths by applying the accelerators in the UNFPA strategic plan, including the one focussing on “leaving no one behind”. In Colombia, maternal deaths were reduced by 43 per cent between 2022 and 2023 in the Department of Chocó, which historically has had one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the country. This was the result of the implementation of the national acceleration plan and the introduction of innovative initiatives, such as ParteraVital, which equips traditional birth attendants with modern skills and tools, such as mobile applications, used to register the newborns and to seek advice to determine whether a newborn requires hospital care (figure 5).

Figure 5
Maternal mortality trends in the Department of Chocó, Colombia



Source: Ministry of Health of Colombia, 2023

42. Despite these gains, the world is not on track to end preventable maternal deaths by 2030. A maternal death occurs almost every two minutes. In 2020, approximately 95 per cent of all maternal deaths occurred in low-income countries and lower middle-income countries. The maternal mortality rate stagnated in 133 countries from 2016 to 2020. More than 80 per cent of countries will not achieve their national maternal mortality targets by 2030.

43. Several challenges hindered the acceleration in the reduction of maternal deaths. In nine countries that faced severe humanitarian crises, maternal mortality was more than double the global average. Since 2020, the acute malnutrition of pregnant and breastfeeding women in humanitarian crises has increased by 20 per cent.

44. There were also significant maternal death inequities between and within regions. For example, although all UNFPA programme countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia have met the Sustainable Development Goal maternal mortality target of 70 per 100,000 live births, progress has been uneven. The lifetime risk of maternal death is more than three times higher in programme countries in Central Asia than it is in Western Europe.

45. The countries with stagnant trends in maternal mortality reduction faced challenges such as: (a) health-system failures, including weak supply chains and lack of competent health staff; (b) insufficient access to and availability of critical life-saving maternal and neonatal health care for marginalized populations, due to social determinants such as income, education, race and ethnicity; (c) lack of public trust in some health systems; and (d) the existence of harmful gender and social norms.

Outcome 3. By 2025, the reduction in gender-based violence and harmful practices has accelerated

Gender-based violence

46. During 2022 to 2023, the world advanced efforts to end gender-based violence. However, data was not yet available to track the pace of its acceleration.

47. In 2023, several countries took significant steps to accelerate progress to end gender-based violence:

- (a) As a result of the advocacy efforts of UNFPA and its partners, Argentina passed a law (known as the Olimpia Law) to prevent gender-based violence online and hold perpetrators accountable;
- (b) In 2023, the Government of Somalia developed a bill criminalizing rape and indecency with the advocacy support of UNFPA and other partners;
- (c) As a result of the UNFPA gender-based violence response and prevention programme, the Government of Ukraine and UNFPA were able to mobilize 109 psychosocial mobile teams,

29 women-friendly spaces and 11 survival relief centres. Since March 2022, UNFPA provided over 26,000 services to women and girls. In addition, more than 42,000 women and girls benefited from psychosocial counselling provided by UNFPA;

- (d) UNFPA leads the gender-based violence subcluster in the Gaza Strip and in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. From October to December 2023, UNFPA provided over 1,000 cash transfers to vulnerable women, including survivors of gender-based violence, to support their urgent basic needs.

48. In addition, UNFPA was leading interventions towards combating technology-facilitated gender-based violence. In 2023, UNFPA developed guidance on the safe and ethical use of technology to address gender-based violence and harmful practices.

49. Globally, 26 per cent of ever-partnered women have been subjected to physical and/or sexual violence by a husband or intimate partner at least once in their lifetime. Approximately 12.5 per cent of ever-partnered women and girls between the ages of 15 and 49 years were subjected to physical and/or sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months.

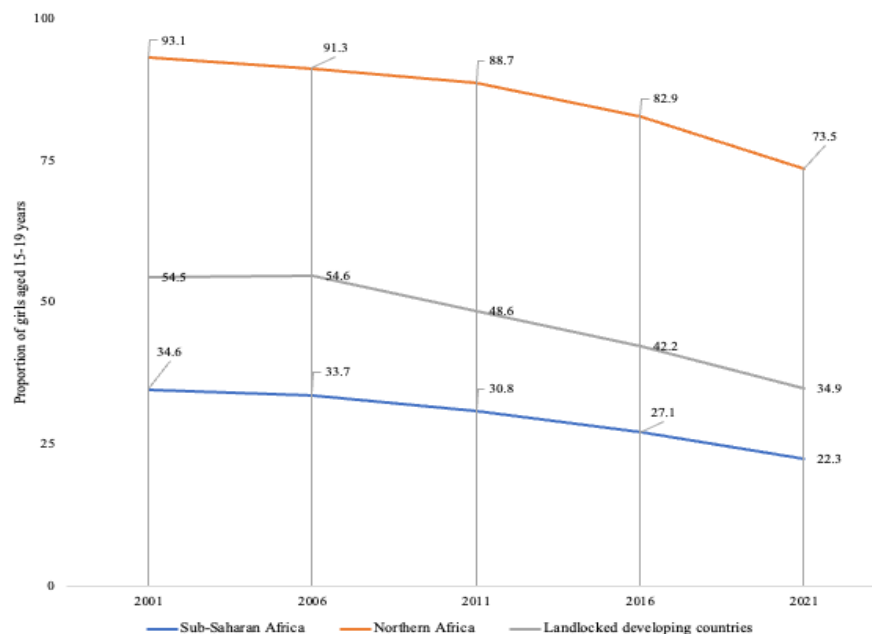
50. Global awareness of violence against older women is growing, but data are limited. The nature, scale, severity and complexity of such violence is likely underestimated.

Female genital mutilation

51. Trends in eliminating female genital mutilation have been moving in a positive direction. The reduction in female genital mutilation has accelerated since UNFPA prioritized it as one of the three transformative results (see figure 6). The rate of reduction in female genital mutilation was 15 per cent from 2016 to 2021, compared to 9 per cent from 2011 to 2016. Half of the progress over the last 30 years was achieved during the last decade. Data was not yet available to assess the situation during the first two years of the implementation of the current strategic plan.

52. Of the 25 countries with the highest incidence of female genital mutilation, 10 countries have made significant progress in terms of a decline in the practice. Ten more countries have shown some progress, while five countries did not demonstrate a significant change.

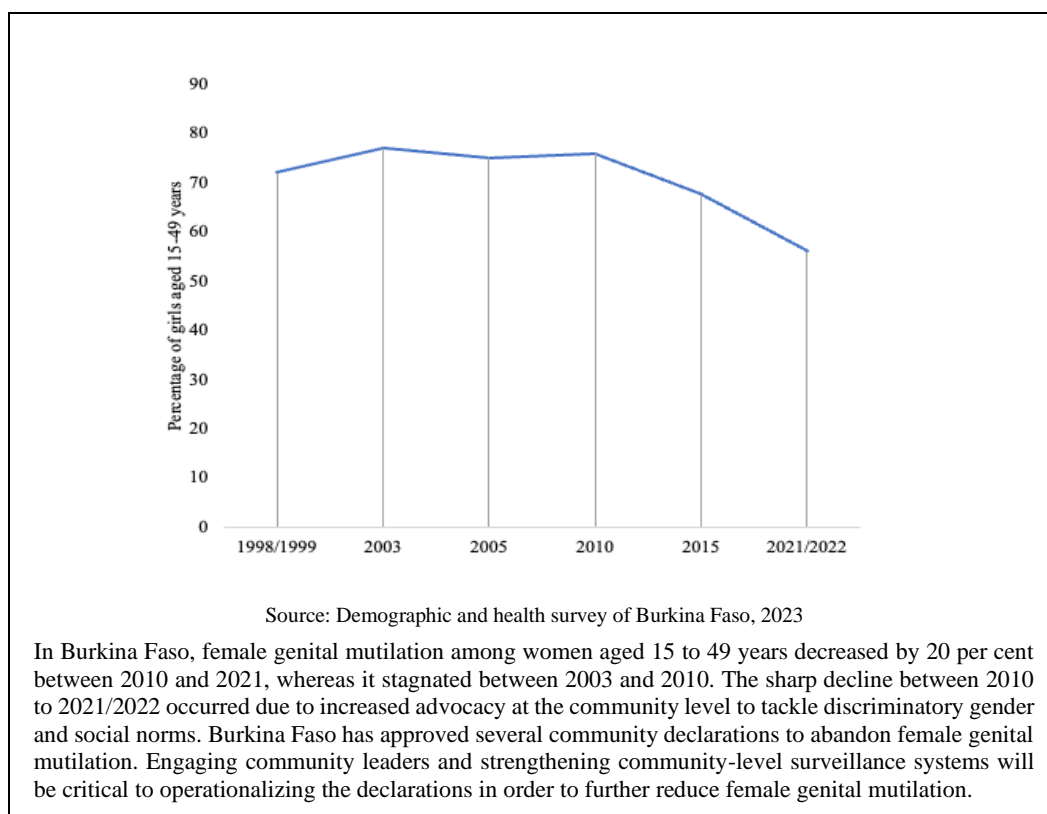
Figure 6
Trends in female genital mutilation, 2001-2021



Source: Global databases, 2023. United Nations Children’s Fund

53. In Kenya, female genital mutilation was reduced from 21 per cent in 2014 to 15 per cent in 2022, as a result of partnerships and high-level political commitments. Burkina Faso has also made significant progress in eliminating female genital mutilation (see figure 7).

Figure 7
Trends in female genital mutilation in Burkina Faso, 1998-2021/2022



54. However, the pace of decline of female genital mutilation has been uneven. Over 200 million women and girls alive today have undergone female genital mutilation. Without concerted and accelerated action, 48 million more girls could be subjected to this practice by 2030.

55. In some countries, there has been an alarming trend to medicalize female genital mutilation. The performance of female genital mutilation by health-care providers constitutes a break in medical professionalism and ethical responsibility. In most countries, it also violates the law. Data reported in 2020 showed that approximately 1 in 4 survivors of female genital mutilation were subjected to the practice by health personnel.

56. UNFPA and UNICEF continued to lead the largest global programme to accelerate the elimination of female genital mutilation in 17 countries. As of 2022, 14 of the 17 countries supported by the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme have legal and policy frameworks banning female genital mutilation.

Child, early and forced marriage

57. The practice of child marriage has continued to decline globally. Today, 1 in 5 young women aged 20-24 years were married as children. Ten years ago, nearly 1 in 4 young women were married as children.

58. The reduction in child marriage accelerated slightly since UNFPA prioritized the ending of child marriage as one of the three transformative results. The prevalence of child marriage before the age of 18 decreased by 9 per cent from 2017 to 2022, compared to 6 per cent from 2011 to 2016. The prevalence of child marriage before the age of 15 fell by 2 per cent from 2016 to 2021, compared to 1.4 per cent from 2011 to 2016.

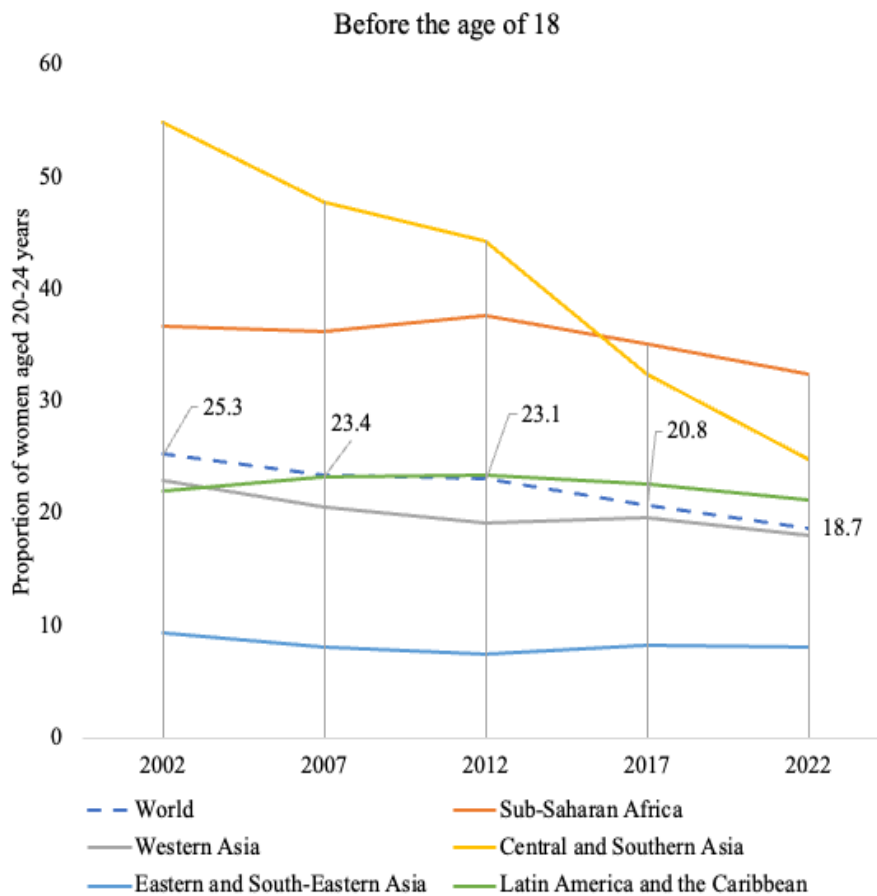
59. Central and Southern Asia achieved the largest decline in the prevalence of child marriage from 2011 to 2016 and from 2016 to 2021 (see figure 8).

60. In 2023, a number of countries sought to accelerate the reduction of child, early and forced marriage. As of 2023, six countries that are members of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) have aligned their legal provisions with the Community’s model law on ending child marriage. UNFPA continues to play a vital role in supporting the model law in SADC countries.

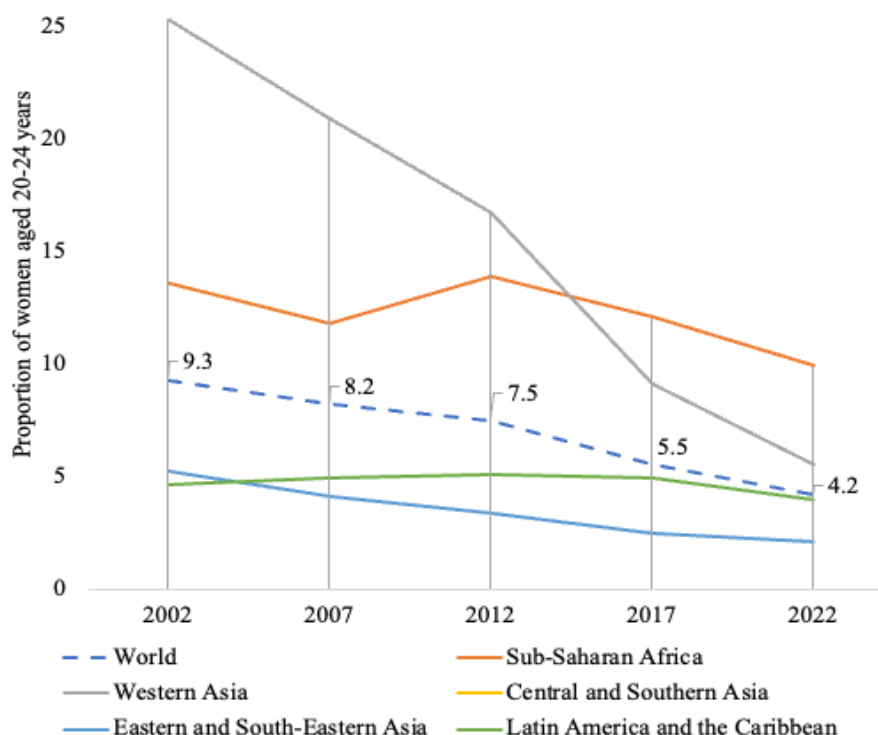
61. Other countries also adopted laws to reduce child, early and forced marriage and violence against women. For example:

- (a) Peru approved a law to prohibit child marriages;
- (b) The Republic of the Congo adopted the first law that criminalizes violence against women and child marriage.

Figure 8
Trends in child marriage, 2002-2022



Before the age of 15



Source: Global databases, 2023. United Nations Children's Fund

62. Globally, approximately 21 per cent of young women were married before the age of 18. The current rate of decline in child marriage is insufficient to meet the 2030 target. Without accelerating the reduction in child marriages, more than 150 million additional girls under 18 years of age will marry by 2030.

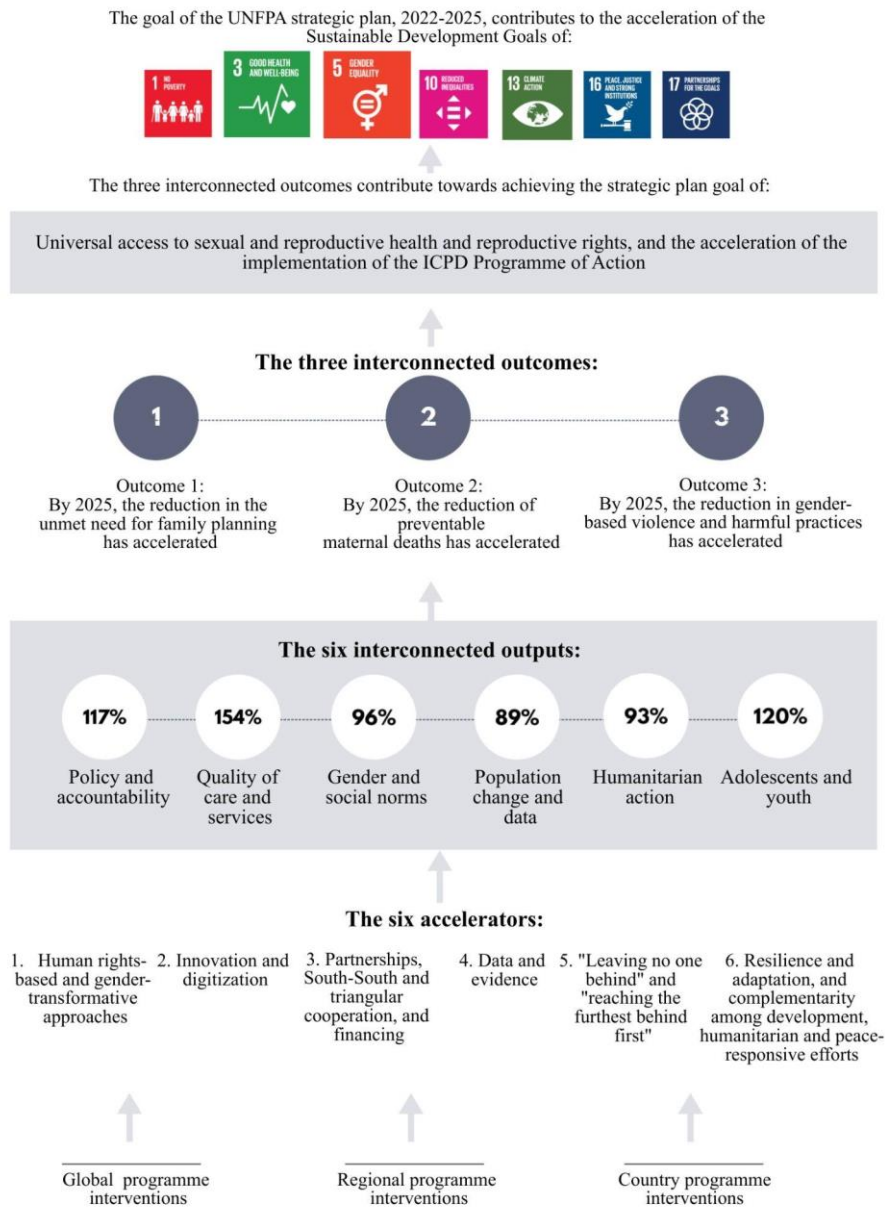
63. UNFPA, together with UNICEF, implements a global programme to tackle child marriage in 12 of the most high-prevalence or high-burden countries. In 2022, with support from the global programme, about 161,000 girls attended primary or secondary school.

B. Achievement of the strategic plan outputs

64. UNFPA recorded steadfast performance on its strategic plan outputs, the pathways through which UNFPA contributes directly to accelerating progress. In 2022, UNFPA fully achieved four of the six outputs. In 2023, the performance improved, and UNFPA fully achieved five of the six outputs. The outputs partially achieved in 2022 were the Population Change and Data and the Gender and Social Norms. In 2023, only the Population Change and Data output was partially achieved (see figure 9).

65. Some UNFPA programme countries are still struggling to prioritize interventions on population data due to fragile situations, government elections and funding gaps.

Figure 9
Six-plus-six frameworks with output performance



66. The midterm review noted that data, analytics, and foresight were persistent weaknesses in achieving the strategic plan outputs and should be strengthened in the organization. UNFPA field offices reported the need for more availability of and access to data and evidence to inform programming, including for thought leadership, for addressing discriminatory gender and social norms, and for integrating megatrends into UNFPA programmes.

67. The midterm review observed that foresight was nascent in UNFPA and would require dedicated investments and sufficient time to mature and inform programming. The new Programme Division has established a dedicated workstream for institutionalizing foresight into UNFPA.

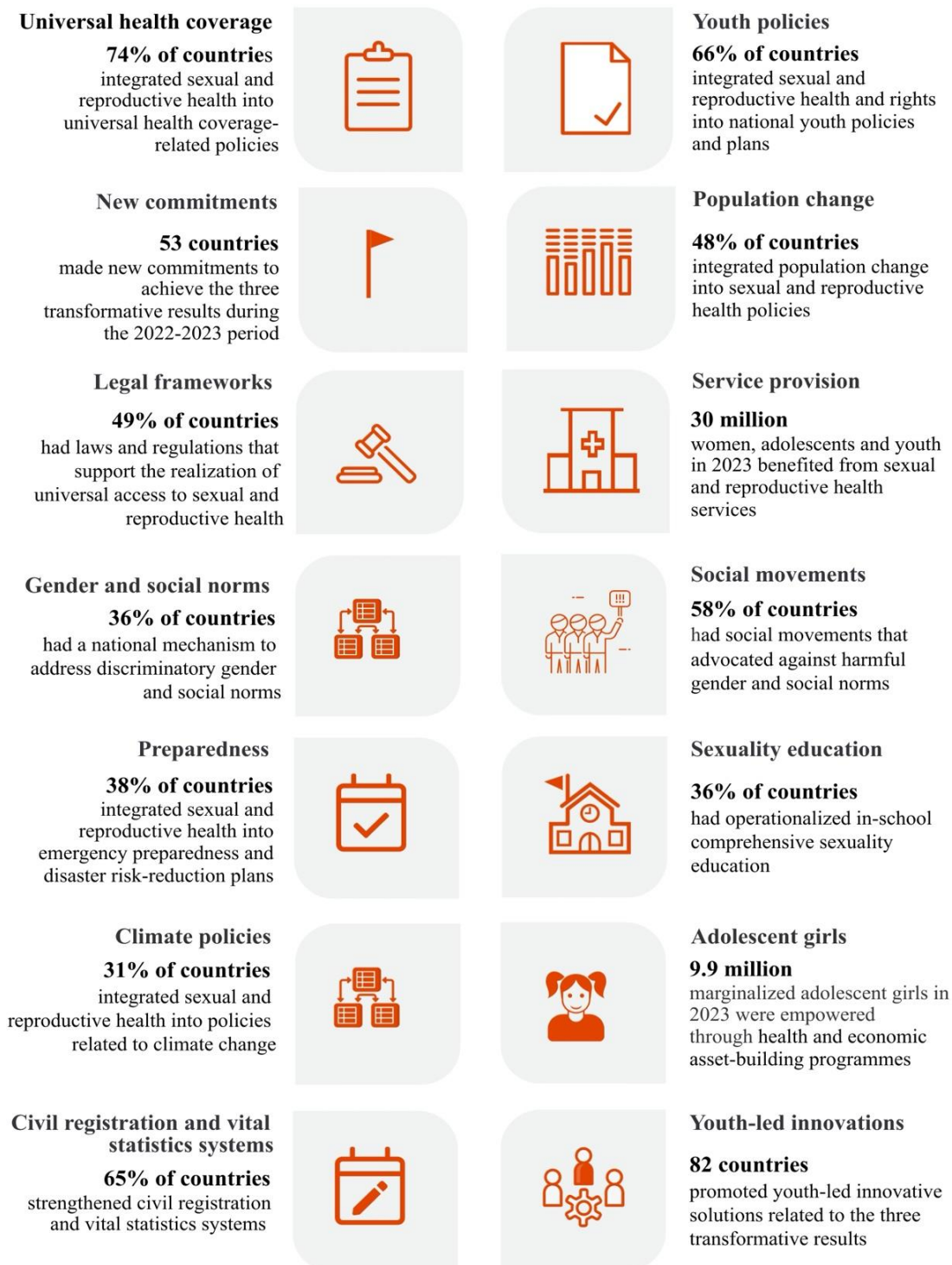
68. Although the gender and social norms output improved between 2022 and 2023, the midterm review found that the field offices required more guidance and technical support to effectively influence changes in gender and social norms. The field offices also required further measurement metrics to track and inform progress in changing discriminative gender and social norms.

69. The midterm review found that field offices deployed the six strategic plan accelerators in contributing to achievement of the outputs. Over 90 per cent of the offices had deployed every accelerator to boost effectiveness and efficiency of their interventions, as postulated in the UNFPA strategic plan, 2022-2025.

70. The global and regional programmes also performed strongly in supporting country programmes, and in the implementations for global and regional commitments to accelerate progress of the three transformative results. At the midpoint of the strategic plan period, the global and regional programmes were achieving 90 per cent of their output targets.

71. Figure 10 below highlights some of the evidence for the output-level achievements that contributed to the formation of a culture of acceleration in UNFPA to achieve the transformative results.

Figure 10
Key output-level achievements as of 2023



C. Organizational effectiveness and efficiency

72. From 2022 to 2023, UNFPA made a number of advancements in organizational effectiveness and efficiency to make UNFPA “fit-for-purpose” – resilient and agile in order to achieve its mandate of sexual and reproductive health for all and support for the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action.

73. During the first two years of the implementation of the strategic plan, UNFPA aligned its systems, policies, practices and culture towards the achievement of the three transformative results. During this time, UNFPA launched its revised gender strategy and its new family planning strategy, and is currently finalizing its maternal health and well-being strategy to guide its efforts to end preventable maternal deaths.

74. Efforts to revamp programming have resulted in nearly 90 per cent of new country programmes demonstrating a sharpened strategic direction, having met the minimum quality criteria. This progress is attributed to a series of innovative initiatives designed to strengthen robust programming on the ground. These initiatives include the institutionalization of Country Programme Strategic Dialogues and the Deep Dive Exercise, which enhance the analytical capabilities of country offices through multidimensional, longitudinal trend analyses and future casting, building on successful pilots in Sierra Leone and Niger. Additionally, the comprehensive overhaul of the programme evaluation approach and methodology, coupled with the integration of deep dive insights into theories of change, has been pivotal to identify and most impactful pathways to achieve the transformative results. Combined with the upcoming strategic direction for quality assurance reviews and the enhancement of strategic foresight for programming, these efforts form a comprehensive approach to ensure that country programmes are both effective and adaptable to the evolving global landscape.

75. UNFPA has made significant investments in “populations left furthest behind” and “reaching those furthest behind first.” In 2022, UNFPA began to implement its “leave no one behind” operational plan. UNFPA also introduced a strategy that focuses on people of African descent.

76. During 2022-2023, UNFPA strengthened collaborations with stakeholders to implement the strategic plan, pursuing the plan’s “call to action” to join efforts to collectively accelerate the achievement of three transformative results and the ICPD Programme of Action. In 2023, UNFPA signed 82 new partnerships at the global level. UNFPA also empowered a number of women-led, youth-led, and indigenous organizations to support full and equal access to sexual and reproductive health, reproductive rights and freedom from violence for indigenous women and girls.

77. UNFPA continued to expand its humanitarian-response capacity. In 2023, around \$671 million of total resources were spent on humanitarian assistance, compared to \$393.6 million in 2021, the year prior to the start of the implementation of the strategic plan, 2022-2025. UNFPA also mainstreamed resilience, prevention, preparedness and early action, and highlighted the complementarity among humanitarian, development and peace-responsive interventions.

78. UNFPA brought about a shift from funding the ICPD agenda to funding *and* financing the ICPD agenda. UNFPA developed the first-ever strategy for financing the ICPD agenda. In addition, financial initiatives, such as the UNFPA Strategic Investment Facility, the matching fund of the UNFPA Supplies Partnership, and investment cases, contributed to the acceleration of the achievement of the three transformative results. As a result of UNFPA advocacy, the Governments of Djibouti, Somalia and Yemen, for example, have committed increased resources for family planning. A Strategic Investment Facility-supported project in Bangladesh realized a rate of return of \$1 to \$8 in 2023, with \$50,000 investment unlocking a national commitment of \$4,484,592 – \$4.25 million is from the Government, the rest from a private partner – to be spent on increasing the use for sexual and reproductive health services in 2024-2025.

79. UNFPA continued to strengthen the results culture within the organization. In 2023, UNFPA launched the new enterprise resource planning system, with improved linkages between results and resources. UNFPA also scaled up its results-based management seal, a recognition-based, innovative approach to strengthen the organization’s results culture. By 2023, UNFPA had trained at least one staff member from each UNFPA country office on results-based management.

80. In 2023, UNFPA achieved an overall operational efficiency gain of \$8.4 million: \$1.7 million were attributable to cost savings; \$0.3 million were attributable to cost avoidance; and \$6.4 million were attributable to staff-time reduction. Of the \$8.4 million in operational efficiency gains, \$7.7 million were generated from UNFPA-specific initiatives and \$0.7 million were generated from bilateral initiatives with partner United Nations organizations.

81. UNFPA continued to maintain a healthy financial position. UNFPA revenue exceeded the \$1 billion mark for the seventh year in a row, and surpassed the funding targets of the strategic plan. Regular resources were \$383.9 million during 2023, down by 13 per cent from 2022; however, they still surpassed the strategic plan target for 2023. Co-financing resources were stable, at approximately \$1.1 billion.
82. UNFPA strengthened partnerships with international financial institutions. In 2023, UNFPA saw around 29 per cent growth in funding originating from international financing institutions.
83. UNFPA also expanded partnerships with governments, financial institutions and private sector partners to set up innovative finance mechanisms, and it developed an innovative financing paper in 2023. UNFPA also rolled out a \$10.1 million development impact bond for adolescent sexual and reproductive health in Kenya.
84. Based upon the results of its enterprise risk management and control self-assessment processes, UNFPA anti-fraud controls were deemed effective in 2023.
85. UNFPA implemented a new enterprise risk management policy in 2023 and enhanced the UNFPA risk management framework by: (a) training staff on risk management principles and practices; (b) developing an enterprise risk management guidebook for the application of risk management strategies; and (c) expanding the risk register to include new risk factors and the development of a comprehensive risk and control catalogue. The new risk register offers a more defined structure to evaluate the effectiveness of internal controls.
86. UNFPA also updated its internal risk planning and reporting systems and implemented risk assessments for all country and regional offices, as per the 2022-2023 enterprise risk management calendar.
87. In 2023, UNFPA received an unqualified audit opinion from the Board of Auditors for the financial year that ended on 31 December 2022, a 13-year consecutive achievement that UNFPA is determined to uphold. UNFPA fully implemented 75 per cent of 36 outstanding recommendations at the beginning of the 2022 financial year. The Executive Board has acknowledged the high rate of implementation of recommendations by UNFPA over the past several years.
88. In 2023, as part of its Culture Initiative, UNFPA held its first Culture Award to acknowledge UNFPA teams around the world that embody UNFPA organizational values such as teamwork, results orientation and innovation, and continue to spearhead the organizational culture needed to achieve the strategic plan results.
89. UNFPA expanded its efforts to advance innovations by women, for women and with women to accelerate the realization of the ICPD Programme of Action and the Fund's three transformative results. Along with investing in strengthening the Fund's innovation capabilities and enabling culture, UNFPA created a strong incentive and recognition system to nurture innovations within UNFPA, including through innovation fairs, awards, and capacity-building initiatives. The midterm review found that 98 per cent of country offices had deployed the innovation and digitalization accelerator to boost the effectiveness and efficiency of their interventions.
90. In 2023, UNFPA continued to strengthen the development of strategic partnerships with private stakeholders at all levels of the organization. Seventy-three new partnerships were established, and more than \$30 million were raised from private sources. In 2023, UNFPA doubled the resources mobilized through its individual giving programme. To further strengthen its partnerships, UNFPA developed: (a) a framework for strategic partnerships; (b) a foundation and philanthropy strategy; and (c) a strategy to engage civil society organizations and parliamentarians.
91. In 2023, UNFPA expanded the coalition for reproductive justice in business. The objective of this coalition is to advance and mainstream the reproductive health agenda of women and girls within the private sector. Seventy-five per cent of companies in the coalition for reproductive health show a high level of maturity in preventing sexual and gender-based violence and maternity care and support in their workplaces.
92. UNFPA continued to utilize United Nations reform as a strategy to accelerate the achievement of the three transformative results. The formative evaluation of UNFPA engagement in the reform process concluded that UNFPA supported the repositioning of the United Nations development system to better support countries in their efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda.
93. UNFPA made notable advances in human resources in 2022 and 2023. For example, it launched its "people strategy" to better align human resources to accelerate the three transformative results. In 2023, UNFPA began the implementation of "brand ambassador" training, an initiative to strengthen the leadership skills and acumen of the heads of UNFPA offices.

94. UNFPA continues to minimize its environmental footprint. During 2022-2023, UNFPA rolled out social and environmental standards for programming. In 2023, UNFPA reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 29 per cent, compared to 2021.

IV. Progress in adopting the key shifts in implementing the UNFPA strategic plan

95. The midterm review of the strategic plan, 2022-2025, examined the implementation of the plan. It assessed organizational readiness and the deployment of key shifts in its implementation. These shifts seek to transform UNFPA into an organization that is fit for purpose and equipped to lead the acceleration of progress in order to achieve the three transformative results and the ICPD Programme of Action. The 12 shifts are shown in figure 11 below.

96. The midterm review determined that the strategic plan was being implemented as planned. The strategic plan had been successfully rolled out, with new strategies, tools and guidance to support UNFPA offices in accelerating progress.

97. The midterm review noted that UNFPA offices found the strategic plan to be a useful tool in supporting the UNFPA mandate, and that field offices had the necessary knowledge to implement it. Over 90 per cent of field offices reported having good knowledge and understanding of the strategic plan. A majority of them also reported having good knowledge about the key shifts in implementing it.

Figure 11

Key shifts in implementing the UNFPA strategic plan, 2022-2025	Percentage of country offices that reported having good knowledge of the shifts
1. Focusing on achieving the three transformative results	98%
2. Integrating the effects of megatrends into programming	63%
3. Leaving no one behind	97%
4. Provision of high-quality sexual and reproductive health information and services, as part of universal health coverage	98%
5. Humanitarian response capacity	77%
6. Humanitarian, development, and peace complementarity	70%
7. Multisectoral approach	94%
8. Tailoring programmatic and technical assistance to better respond to local contexts	88%
9. UNFPA normative role	87%
10. Funding to financing	60%
11. Partnerships and South-South cooperation	81%
12. Joint accountability	79%

Source: Country office survey of the midterm review of the UNFPA strategic plan, 2022-2025

98. The midterm review determined that UNFPA had made significant progress in adopting and applying the key shifts in implementing the strategic plan, and many country offices reported having applied the shifts in their programmes. Nearly all of them implemented the following two key shifts: (a) aligning their programmes to the three transformative results; and (b) applying the concept of leaving no one behind.

99. Some country offices reported facing challenges in applying some of the key shifts. Several country offices, especially those in middle-income countries or in countries with low fertility and ageing populations, faced challenges in positioning the transformative results at the country level. In addition, some country offices reported challenges in pursuing the normative role of UNFPA when faced with sensitivities or opposition to some elements of the ICPD Programme of Action. The country offices also required more robust metrics to measure progress in their normative work.

100. In particular, country offices reported facing challenges in implementing the key shifts related to: (a) funding to financing; and (b) integrating megatrends into UNFPA programming.

101. The midterm review ascertained that knowledge management in UNFPA needs to be improved to better support the application of the key shifts. The use of analytics, and documenting and sharing evidence internally and externally must be improved. In addition, the knowledge management platform should be upgraded to keep abreast of rapidly changing information technology.

V. Priorities for 2024 to 2025

102. To address the challenges and gaps in implementing the key shifts outlined in the strategic plan, and to ensure that UNFPA is well-equipped to accelerate progress, UNFPA will prioritize the following six actions in 2024 and 2025:

- (a) Sharpen the UNFPA narrative of the three transformative results to connect them more strongly to the different social, economic and demographic contexts, including in low-fertility, high-income and middle-income countries. UNFPA will construct solid evidence, emphasizing the criticality of reproductive rights and choices to the achievement of sustainable development in all contexts;
- (b) Enhance the normative role of UNFPA further by investing in data analytics, advocacy, and communication. UNFPA will strengthen its data analytic capacity to produce critical products such as Country investment cases for the three transformative results. It will also enhance staff capacity in advocacy and communication, give more attention to thought leadership, and define measurement metrics to track progress in normative work;
- (c) Design and deploy innovative and impactful interventions, including gender transformative interventions, to change discriminatory gender and social norms by (i) focusing on root causes (cultural, legal, economic and social); (ii) partnering with local and youth organizations, social movements and think tanks; (iii) building organizational capacity in behavioural change communication; and (iv) defining better metrics to assess progress and impact in this area.
- (d) Further develop analytical, innovative and foresight capacities. by: (i) closing the data and evidence gaps in critical areas such as gender-based violence, and the climate change and sexual and reproductive health interrelationships; (ii) harnessing new data sources and technology, including generative artificial intelligence; (iii) institutionalizing strategic intelligence and foresight, including by developing a foresight strategy; and (iv) building staff capacity in the collection, analysis and use of data and evidence. Advancing this critical area of work will contribute to the realization of the Secretary-General's vision for UN 2.0, a transformation towards a more agile, diverse, responsive and impactful United Nations;
- (e) Increase efforts to leverage development financing, especially domestic public and private financing, for the ICPD Programme of Action and the three transformative results. UNFPA will seek to enhance its capacity in development financing by: (i) operationalizing the UNFPA ICPD financing strategy, (ii) strengthening the capacity of staff and partners in development financing, (iii) enhancing partnerships and collaboration with financial institutions, including international financial institutions; (iv) assisting local institutions in budgeting and financing and in mobilizing domestic and international resources; and (v) developing measurement metrics for tracking and recognizing progress and success in efforts to mobilize financing for the three transformative results and the ICPD Agenda.

(f) Optimize and systematize innovation and knowledge management to improve creating, capturing, documenting and sharing innovative and successful solutions by: (i) building staff capacity in knowledge generation and dissemination, as per UNFPA knowledge management strategy 2024-2030; (ii) leveraging the power of innovation and technology through innovations by women, for women and with women, to equalize opportunities for women and girls and ensure rights and choices for all; (iii) harnessing innovation to meet tomorrow's challenges and boost its impact, especially in addressing the populations furthest left behind, and leverage opportunities, social capital, funding and technology by strengthening the corporate innovation architecture and capabilities and scaling up innovations that have proven to be effective and impactful; forming new partnerships and connecting with relevant innovation ecosystems; expanding communities and the culture for innovation; and strengthening and leveraging financing for innovation, as articulated in the UNFPA innovation strategy being developed; and (iv) leveraging information technology advancements, including artificial intelligence, machine learning and big data.

103. In addition to these six actions, UNFPA will continue to: (a) strengthen its humanitarian response and preparedness capacity; (b) improve programming for results by deploying impactful interventions and focusing on learning and adaptation; and (c) strengthen partnerships and leverage existing United Nations inter-agency mechanisms and structures.

104. UNFPA will also seek to optimize its structure to improve field offices' access to even more relevant and coherent technical and programmatic support that is timely and of higher quality.

VI. Lessons learned

105. A well-focused strategic plan, such as the current UNFPA strategic plan, makes implementation more manageable, including in obtaining partner commitments, securing accountability of duty-bearers, and mobilizing resources for the achievement of the strategic plan results. Because of its focus, it has been easier to integrate the UNFPA strategic plan's aspirations and objectives into local development frameworks and plans. UNFPA will continue to leverage these opportunities to further support the acceleration of progress toward the three transformative results and the ICPD Programme of Action.

106. Accelerating progress to achieve the transformative results requires a multisectoral approach. All stakeholders must address the root causes of the unmet need for family planning, preventable maternal deaths, and gender-based violence and harmful practices, while ensuring complementarity among humanitarian, development and peace-responsive efforts.

107. Advocates, such as parliamentarians and civil society organizations, including organizations led by women and young people, are central to ensuring the integration of the transformative results into national priorities and the implementation of those priorities.

108. Maintaining and prioritizing the normative role of UNFPA is fundamental to accelerating progress. Furthermore, the ability to assess social, economic and political dynamics is crucial for the design and implementation of effective interventions. Ensuring that the commitments of the 2030 Agenda are translated into practical action requires a thorough understanding of target populations and geographical areas.

109. Analytical and predictive data and evidence about the transformative results and their linkages to social, economic and environmental factors are essential in mobilizing and securing domestic commitments and support in order to accelerate progress. For example, the costing and impact data presented in the investment cases of the transformative results were instrumental in the quest to accelerate progress.

110. United Nations reforms have enhanced the ability of UNFPA to advance women's and girls' reproductive rights, and to position the three transformative results and the ICPD agenda into sustainable development frameworks and strategies.

111. The midterm review underscored the importance of flexible and predictable funding, particularly for regular resources, to accelerate the implementation of the three transformative results and the ICPD Programme of Action. Core resources allow UNFPA to effectively carry out its normative role and provide essential services to countries, communities and individuals, particularly those most in need.

112. Investing in the three transformative results has a powerful multiplier effect, with significant financial and human capital returns. For instance, UNFPA found that for every dollar invested in family planning and maternal health in developing countries, the benefit to families and societies was estimated to be \$8.40.

VII. Midterm adjustments to resources

113. The revised income estimates for UNFPA indicate growth in income compared to the initial budget for 2022-2025. The expected income for regular resources for the strategic plan cycle is estimated at \$1.7 billion (up from \$1.65 billion), while other resources are estimated at \$4.9 billion (up from \$4.1 billion). However, the proportion of regular resources in total income is expected to decline, signalling an imbalance in funding sources.

114. In view of these estimates, and in pursuit of its strategic priorities, UNFPA proposes adjustments to its integrated budget. Development activities, which account for 88.3 per cent of total use of resources, will increase by 20 per cent, from \$4.5 billion to \$5.4 billion. UNFPA also proposes to increase the appropriation for its institutional budget to \$872.3 million, an increase of 3.9 per cent. While the nominal appropriation for the institutional budget increases, its relative share of the total use of resources will decrease, from 16.2 per cent to 14.3 per cent, for the 2022-2025 period.

115. UNFPA will maintain the resource distribution by outcomes and outputs indicated in the initial budget of the UNFPA strategic plan, 2022-2025. The relative prioritization among the outcomes and the outputs has remained the same at the midpoint of the strategic plan period.

VIII. The next strategic plan

116. The next UNFPA strategic plan (for 2026-2029) will continue to focus on accelerating the achievement of the three transformative results, the ICPD Programme of Action and other relevant intergovernmental frameworks. The next strategic plan will include: (a) a future-ready business model; (b) the leveraging of partnerships and United Nations system coordination; (c) the leveraging of domestic and development financing; and (d) effective responses to megatrends, opportunities and challenges in a world of increased uncertainty and crisis.

117. Findings from the midterm review will be reflected in the next strategic plan. UNFPA will present a road map for the development of the next strategic plan at the second regular session 2024 of the Executive Board.
