



state of world population 2022

SEEING THE UNSEEN

The case for action in the
neglected crisis of
unintended pregnancy

State of World Population 2022

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A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

Language is important when we talk about unintended pregnancy. Unintended pregnancies are not the same as unwanted pregnancies, and pregnant individuals are not the same as mothers. Not all individuals who become pregnant are women and girls — transgender men and non-binary people can and do become pregnant (Clements, 2018). They also face serious barriers to non-judgmental sexual and reproductive health care and contraception, increasing their risk of unintended pregnancy. However, the data used in this report overwhelmingly come from surveys and studies that identify participants as women or girls; to broaden the conclusions from those data to include gender-diverse people could result in inaccuracies or even the erasure of concerns specific to sexual minorities. Therefore, this report refers generally to the pregnancy risks facing women and girls, while acknowledging in many places that these same risks are also borne by gender-diverse individuals. Additionally, definitions are included throughout the text to highlight the nuances of terms like “unintended pregnancy”, “unwanted pregnancy”, “unplanned pregnancy” and “unmet need”, how they are commonly used and the limitations of those terms.



ENSURING RIGHTS AND CHOICES FOR ALL



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FOREWORD



A world where every pregnancy is wanted. This aim is a central pillar of our mission at UNFPA.

Every human being has the right to bodily autonomy, and perhaps nothing is more fundamental to the exercise of that right than the ability to choose whether, when and with whom to become pregnant.

The basic human right to determine freely and responsibly the number and the spacing of one's children has been recognized in numerous international human rights agreements over the past five decades. During this same period, the world has seen a vast expansion in the availability of effective, modern contraceptives — one of the greatest public health achievements in recent history. Why, then, are nearly half of all pregnancies unintended?

In 1994, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) recognized that the empowerment, full equality and autonomy of women were essential to social and economic progress. Today, these aims are among the cornerstones for achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It explicitly recognizes the role of sexual and reproductive health and gender equality in unlocking a more prosperous future, and contains specific indicators linked to women and adolescent girls' agency in making informed decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive health care.

That is why UNFPA's efforts focus on expanding access to the information and services women and girls need to exercise their reproductive rights and choices, which underpin gender equality and enable them to exercise greater power over their lives and realize their full potential.

We know the steep costs associated with unintended pregnancy — costs to an individual's health, education and future, costs to whole health systems, workforces and societies. The question is: why has this not inspired more action to secure bodily autonomy for all?

The topic of this report is a challenging one, in part because it is so common. Nearly everyone has an experience to draw upon, whether they have faced an unintended pregnancy themselves or know someone who has. For some, it is a personal crisis; for others, it is a blessing in disguise.

Beyond the personal context, unintended pregnancies have societal roots and global consequences. This, therefore, is not a report about unwanted babies or happy accidents. It is not a report about motherhood. And although abortion cannot be removed from the discussion — more than 60 per cent of unintended pregnancies end in abortion — this is not a report about abortion either. Instead, this report is about the circumstances that exist before an unintended pregnancy, when a person or a couple's agency to decide is critically undermined, and about the many

impacts that follow, affecting individuals and societies over generations.

We see, through original research by the authors and in new data from partner organizations, that shame, stigma, fear, poverty, gender inequality and many other factors undermine women and girls' ability to exercise choice, to seek and obtain contraceptives, to negotiate condom use with a partner, to speak aloud and pursue their desires and ambitions. Most of all, this report raises provocative and unsettling questions about how much the world values women and girls beyond their reproductive capacities. Because recognizing the full worth of women and girls, and enabling them to contribute fully to their societies, means ensuring they have the tools, information and power to make this fundamental choice for themselves.

It is impossible to fully ascertain, let alone quantify, the overall toll of unintended pregnancies. Yet a growing body of evidence points to massive opportunity costs — from correlations tying unintended pregnancy rates to lower human development scores, to billions of dollars in related health-care costs, to persistently high rates of unsafe abortion and related maternal deaths. Unsafe abortion is one of the leading causes of the more than 800 maternal deaths occurring each day. This is a price tag the world simply cannot afford.

We are fast approaching 2030, the deadline for the Sustainable Development Goals and for UNFPA's own transformative goals — to

end the unmet need for family planning, end preventable maternal deaths and end gender-based violence and harmful practices, including female genital mutilation and child marriage. Now is the time to accelerate, not retreat, to transform the lives of women and girls and reach those furthest behind. Preventing unintended pregnancies is a non-negotiable first step. When individuals are able to exercise real informed choice over their health, bodies and futures, they can contribute to more prosperous societies and a more sustainable, equitable and just world.

Dr. Natalia Kanem

Executive Director

United Nations Population Fund

DEFINITIONS

Definitions around unintended pregnancy and contraception are often fraught. Many of the terms commonly accepted in one community are incomprehensible in another. This report explores some of these terms and their uses, highlighting when these terms are confusing, misleading or used in multiple ways.

UNINTENDED PREGNANCY (N)

MAY BE WANTED
OR UNWANTED.

A PREGNANCY THAT OCCURS TO A WOMAN WHO WAS NOT PLANNING TO HAVE ANY (MORE) CHILDREN, OR THAT WAS MISTIMED, IN THAT IT OCCURRED EARLIER THAN DESIRED. THIS DEFINITION IS APPLIED INDEPENDENT OF THE OUTCOME OF THE PREGNANCY (WHETHER ABORTION, MISCARRIAGE OR UNPLANNED BIRTH).

SYNONYM: UNPLANNED PREGNANCY.

FAMILY PLANNING (N) -

THE INFORMATION, MEANS AND METHODS THAT ALLOW INDIVIDUALS TO DECIDE IF AND WHEN TO HAVE CHILDREN. IT INCLUDES A WIDE RANGE OF CONTRACEPTIVES AS WELL AS NON-INVASIVE METHODS SUCH AS THE CALENDAR METHOD AND ABSTINENCE. IT ALSO INCLUDES INFORMATION ABOUT HOW TO BECOME PREGNANT WHEN IT IS DESIRABLE, AS WELL AS TREATMENT OF INFERTILITY.

USAGE NOTE: THE TERM "FAMILY PLANNING" DOES NOT RESONATE WITH CERTAIN POPULATIONS. (PAUL AND OTHERS, 2019).

SYNONYMS: CONTRACEPTION, BIRTH CONTROL.

UNWANTED PREGNANCY (N) -

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