



The United Nations
sexual and reproductive
health agency

Subtitle / references

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Did ICPD Divert Attention from Rapid Population Growth?

The UNFPA Perspective: Why Human Rights and Reproductive Agency Remain the Most Effective
Demographic Strategy

A Shift in Strategy, Not a Loss of Focus

01 1994 ICPD Cairo Consensus

The 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo did not ignore demographic challenges.

Instead, it represented a resounding consensus of all Member States to support governments in confronting these demographic challenges by enhancing individual rights and choices and investing in the capacity of all people.

02 ICPD Programme of Action

UNFPA's work continues to be guided by the ICPD Programme of Action (PoA), which recognizes that addressing population growth requires acknowledging key thematic links:

Sustainable Development

Sexual & Reproductive Health (SRH)

Gender Equality

Addressing Population Dynamics at the Macro Level

01 Transition Model

Rapid population growth not as an isolated crisis, but as a phase within the standard framework of the demographic transition model.

02 Transition Dynamics

This transition typically starts with a decline in mortality, followed by a decline in fertility, which naturally results in a period of accelerated population growth rates before population growth eventually slows down.

03 Development Focus

Rather than utilizing coercion, UNFPA constantly explores how these changes in population dynamics affect development and poverty in a country and vice versa, directly addressing the impact of a growing population on the overall performance of the economy.

Family Planning as a Pillar of Rights and Choices

01 Central Mandate

Promoting family planning is central to the UNFPA mandate and is a critical piece of the unfinished business of the 1994 ICPD Programme of Action.

02 Rights & Choices

We do not treat family planning as a top-down tool for state demographic control. Instead, we recognize it as an integral part of comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights.

03 National Ownership

To sustainably navigate population growth, UNFPA scales up its agenda-shaping role to ensure robust national health systems and national ownership of family planning services.

04 Sustainable Financing

By achieving sustainable financing for family planning, we guarantee that all people—including adolescents and youth—have access to contraceptives and can freely determine the spacing and number of their children.

Conclusion: Rights-Based Demography Works

01 Human Rights Over Targets

In conclusion, the ICPD did not divert attention from rapid population growth; it abandoned the ineffective and harmful use of arbitrary demographic targets in favor of human rights.

02 Sustainable Transition

By prioritizing women's empowerment, reproductive rights, and human capacity, the ICPD framework provides the most sustainable, dignified, and effective method to navigate the demographic transition.