

# 1,000,000,000 adolescents

are about to enter their reproductive years. For all of them, it will be a critical time. For many, it will be fatal. Over 500,000 women die in pregnancy and childbirth each year, many of them young girls. Today, 42 million people are living with HIV/AIDS. Half of all new HIV infections are among young people. Girls are at particular risk.

UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, works to ensure safe passage into adulthood for millions of young people. At the International Parliamentarians' Conference (IPCI/ICPD) in Ottawa, Canada, elected representatives from 72 countries and territories pledged to save adolescents' lives by giving them the education, opportunities and services that are vital for their health. This pledge is part of UNFPA's mission: protect and empower the young to safeguard humanity's future.

For more information visit [www.unfpa.org](http://www.unfpa.org)

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International Parliamentarians'  
Conference on the  
Implementation of the ICPD  
Programme of Action

IPCI  
ICPD



“All young people have a right to health, including reproductive health, and the information and services to make this right a reality. This is especially urgent in the fight against HIV/AIDS. UNFPA supports national efforts to ensure that young people can make informed, responsible decisions and lead healthy, productive lives.”

— Thoraya A. Obaid, Executive Director, UNFPA

More than 1 billion young people are between the ages of 15 and 24. They need supportive relationships and respect. In return, the world needs their active participation.

### Adolescent Reproductive Health

Ignoring young people's sexuality does not solve their problems. Among girls aged 15 to 19, 15 million give birth each year and 4 million undergo abortions—many unsafe. Only 17 per cent of sexually active young people use contraceptives. With limited knowledge about their bodies, adolescents are vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections, substance abuse, exploitation and violence. Both girls and boys suffer when denied access to needed information and services. Gender has a major impact, however: 82 million girls in developing countries will be married before their 18th birthday. Early marriage often leads to early childbearing, which not only limits life opportunities but carries serious health risks.

*Protect and empower girls and boys before it is too late • Provide sexuality education • Delay marriage • Prevent unwanted pregnancies • Ensure affordable, accessible and youth-friendly services • Combat gender stereotypes • Treat pregnancy-related illnesses such as obstetric fistula • Establish national policies for youth • Conduct better research • Raise awareness of the dangers of early childbirth • Protect adolescents at greater risk because they are female, poor, refugees, living on the streets, out of school or otherwise vulnerable*

#### Success Story

In Mongolia, all secondary schools are now required to teach a course on sexuality education, designed by local professionals with UNFPA support.

### HIV/AIDS and Young People

HIV/AIDS can be stopped—and can only be stopped—by educating, empowering and mobilizing young people. The life skills that enable young people to avoid unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections are, in the era of HIV/AIDS, a matter of life and death. Every day, nearly 6,000 young people become infected with HIV. Half of all new infections occur among young people aged 15 to 24. Young women and adolescent girls are highly vulnerable. We know that prevention works: trends are reversing where national programmes aim to prevent infection among young people.

*At different ages and stages, advocate abstinence to delay the start of sexual activity, being faithful in sexual relationships and, for sexually active young people, correct and consistent use of male and female condoms • Support sexuality and HIV/AIDS education • Safeguard young people's human rights • Welcome actions by young people to mobilize their peers, families, communities and governments • Ensure access to voluntary testing, counselling and early treatment • Involve boys and men in ending violence against women and protecting their sexual partners from infection*

#### Success Story

In Sierra Leone, UNFPA is providing life-saving information and services to girls and women who were abducted and raped during the conflict and to other war-affected youth as well. After the civil war, the country faces a new enemy in HIV/AIDS.

### Youth Participation

With energy, ambition and a will to change, young people can shape the future of their countries. They are making a difference as peer educators helping others avoid unwanted pregnancy and STIs, as actors in plays on HIV/AIDS prevention, as speakers asking politicians to listen. Most of the world's 1 billion young people live in developing countries. Young people (especially adolescent girls) need a voice in decisions affecting their lives and opportunities to participate as citizens and actors of change. The benefits for all include human rights, social cohesion and stability, and productive adults contributing to development.

*Involve young people in decision-making processes • Educate to improve knowledge and life skills • Engage in dialogue • Promote girls' empowerment and gender equality • Facilitate youth leadership, citizenship and partnership with adults • Reduce poverty and increase opportunities • Recognize differences based on age, gender and culture • Enlist parents, teachers and communities in support of young people's participation*

#### Success Story

Young people's involvement shaped an important National Adolescent and Youth Policy for the Dominican Republic. Invited to participate in the drafting process, carried out with UNFPA support, young people gained recognition as a national resource and positive force.

### Involve young people in planning and producing events for World Population Day on 11 July 2003.

- Engage artists, writers, actors, painters and musicians to work together with young people in creating messages for the day.
- Organize public contests for the best posters, essays, songs, speeches, plays, poems, slogans and artwork about young people and reproductive health. Offer prizes or publication and arrange local media coverage.
- Hold workshops, debates, lectures, seminars, round table discussions and press conferences.
- Write case studies and examples that tell the story of a person or programme. Use quotes, set the scene, describe the people and the process. Work with journalists to create special materials or supplements for newspapers and magazines.
- Produce programmes for radio, television and film.
- Share information and link to the UNFPA web site ([www.unfpa.org](http://www.unfpa.org)).
- Encourage discussions among young people inside and outside school.

Real success stories inspire action. UNFPA is collecting summaries of reproductive health activities showing positive results, whether implemented with governments, NGOs, schools, community groups or individuals. Please write up your experiences and send them to [dungus@unfpa.org](mailto:dungus@unfpa.org) or to this address: **United Nations Population Fund Information Executive Board and Resource Mobilization Division** 220 East 42nd Street, New York, NY 10017, USA Telephone: +1 (212) 297 5020 Facsimile: +1 (212) 557 6416 Web site: [www.unfpa.org](http://www.unfpa.org)