



Shaping Africa's Future with Evidence, Equity, and Innovation for Impact

Health and Well-Being for All

WHO African Region – Status, Progress, and Emerging Challenges

The WHO African Region has experienced substantial improvements in health and survival over the past two decades. Life expectancy has increased faster than in any other region globally since 2000. However, persistent maternal and infectious disease burdens, rising noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), demographic pressures, climate vulnerability, and health system constraints continue to threaten progress toward universal health and well-being.

This fact sheet summarizes key demographic, epidemiological, and health system indicators shaping the Region's trajectory toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the African Union Agenda 2063.

Demographic and Epidemiological Overview

- **Population (2021):** 1.163 billion
 - 50.1% women
- **Life expectancy at birth (2019):** 64.5 years
- **Healthy life expectancy:**
 - 47.1 years (2000)
 - 56.1 years (2019)
 - Women: 57.1 years
 - Men: 55.0 years

The Region has recorded the fastest gains in life expectancy globally since 2000. Despite this progress, health-adjusted life expectancy remains significantly below global averages.

Health Across the Life Course

Pre-Pregnancy and Family Planning

- **Contraceptive prevalence (2017):** 28%
- **Women lacking access to modern contraceptives:** 43.7%
- Lowest contraceptive prevalence observed in:
 - South Sudan (4.1%)
 - Chad (6%)
 - Nigeria (8.1%)

Limited access to reproductive health services remains a major determinant of maternal mortality and adolescent birth rates.



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Pregnancy and Birth

- **First antenatal care visit (ANC1):** 83.3%
- **Four antenatal visits (ANC4):** 56.3%
- **Skilled birth attendance:** 65%
- **Maternal mortality ratio (2020):** 531 per 100,000 live births
- **Reduction in maternal mortality since 2000:** 38%

Countries with the highest maternal mortality ratios include:

- South Sudan (1223)
- Chad (1063)
- Nigeria (1047)
- **Neonatal tetanus cases (2020):** 1,218

Maternal mortality remains among the highest globally, reflecting persistent service quality and access gaps.

Infancy and Childhood (0–10 Years)

- **Exclusive breastfeeding rate:** 45.7%
- **Children missing basic vaccines:** 1 in 5
- **Children affected by vaccine-preventable diseases annually:** over 30 million
- **Vitamin A deficiency prevalence:** 48%
- **Care-seeking for pneumonia:** 30–60% coverage

While immunization and child survival have improved over time, coverage stagnation is observed in several countries.

Adolescents (10–19 Years)

- **Adolescent population:** 255.8 million
- **Adolescent birth rate:** 99 per 1,000 girls
- **Adolescents living with mental disorders:** 37 million
- **Suicide:** 9th leading cause of death among adolescents
- **Alcohol use (15–19 years):** 21%

Adolescent health challenges are closely linked to educational access, gender inequality, and social protection systems.

Major Disease Burden

HIV/AIDS

- **Adults living with HIV (2021):** 24.3 million
- **ART coverage:** 68.7%



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- **Reduction in new infections since 2005:** 47%
- Only Algeria and Namibia achieved 90% ART coverage targets (2018).
- Adolescent girls face disproportionately higher infection rates.

Despite progress, the Region remains the global epicenter of HIV burden.

Tuberculosis

- **Cases (2021):** 2.5 million
- **Deaths:** 501,000
- **Treatment success rate:** 86%

TB remains closely associated with HIV co-infection and health system capacity.

Malaria

- **Cases (2021):** 234 million
- **Deaths:** 593,470
- **Incidence reduction (2000–2020):** from 368 to 232 per 1,000 population

The Region accounts for the majority of global malaria burden.

Noncommunicable Diseases (NCDs)

- **Adults with raised blood pressure:** 33%
- **Increase in adult obesity since 2005:** 45%
- **People living with diabetes (2021):** 24 million
- **Undiagnosed diabetes cases:** 54%
- **New cancer cases annually:** 1.1 million
- **Cancer survival rates:** $\leq 20\%$

The Region is undergoing a rapid epidemiological transition, with rising NCDs occurring alongside persistent infectious diseases.

Violence and Injuries

- **Road traffic deaths (2021):** 297,100
- **Homicides (2020):** 158,000

Violence and injury represent major but often under-recognized contributors to premature mortality.

Climate Change and Health

- Africa contributes only 2–4% of global emissions, yet bears disproportionate climate impacts.
- **Disasters recorded (2010–2020):** 622



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- **Population affected by disasters (2021):** 11.1%
- **Projected additional deaths (2030–2050):** 250,000 annually
- **Projected direct health costs by 2030:** US\$ 2–4 billion annually

Health impacts include:

- Malnutrition
- Malaria
- Diarrheal diseases
- Heat stress
- Mental health disorders

Climate change is increasingly recognized as a systemic health threat multiplier.

Health Workforce Capacity

- **Doctors:** 2.9 per 10,000 population
- **Nurses and midwives:** 12.9 per 10,000 population

Workforce shortages constrain service delivery, particularly in rural and fragile settings.

Key Systemic Challenges

- Persistently high maternal and neonatal mortality
- Stagnating immunization coverage
- Rising burden of noncommunicable diseases
- Growing mental health needs
- Health financing gaps
- Climate vulnerability
- Health workforce shortages
- Antimicrobial resistance
- Weak civil registration and vital statistics systems

Conclusion

The WHO African Region has achieved measurable gains in survival and life expectancy over the past two decades. However, progress remains uneven and fragile. The coexistence of infectious diseases, rising noncommunicable conditions, demographic pressures, climate vulnerability, and constrained health systems underscores the need for integrated, equity-focused, and resilient health strategies.

Sustained investment in primary health care, health workforce strengthening, reproductive health services, adolescent health, climate adaptation, and health system governance will be central to achieving Health for All.

Source: World Health Organization Regional Office for Africa. *Health and well-being for all in the WHO African Region* (latest available edition).