

Act now to improve the health of women, children and adolescents worldwide, say experts

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Societies are failing women, children and adolescents, particularly in the poorest communities around the world, and urgent action is needed to save lives and improve health, say global health experts.

In a special supplement published today by *The BMJ*, public health experts from around the globe highlight the critical actions and investments that will have the greatest impact on the health and well-being of women, children and [adolescents](#).

The 15 papers in this special supplement outline the current evidence, identify successes as well as critical gaps in progress, and highlight key priorities to end preventable deaths and ensure that women, children and adolescents can thrive and build resilient and prosperous societies.

Dr Marleen Temmerman, Director of WHO Department of Reproductive Health and Research including HRP, and one of the lead authors of the special supplement states, "Clearly business as usual will not work. For women, children and adolescents around the world to survive, thrive and transform our current society to arrive at the future we want, we need radical actions that will result in enormous social, demographic, and economic benefits."

Although great strides have been made in reducing child and maternal mortality by 53% and over 40% respectively since 1990, the authors

explain how many more lives can be saved by improving access to essential health interventions.

Vast inequities within and between countries mean that the poorest, most disadvantaged women, children, and adolescents often miss out on life-saving health services and experience serious violations of their human rights.

Some low- and middle-income countries have:

- Up to three times more pregnancies among teenage girls in rural and indigenous populations than in urban populations
- A difference of up to 80% between the richest and poorest people in the proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel
- A gap of at least 18% in the proportion who seek care for children with pneumonia symptoms, between the poorest and richest people and
- A difference of least 25% in access to antenatal care (of at least four visits) between the most and least educated and between the richest and poorest.

"No woman, child or adolescent should face a greater risk of preventable death just because of where they live," says Dr Flavia Bustreo, Assistant Director-General of the World Health Organization. "We know what needs to be done. With the existing evidence, we now have the opportunity to end [preventable deaths](#) among all women, children, and adolescents, to vastly improve their health, and to bring about the transformative changes needed to fully realise their human rights and build resilient and prosperous societies."

The papers published today provide the evidence that has helped inform the development of a new Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and

Adolescents' Health, which will be launched at the United Nations General Assembly in New York on 26 September 2015.

As the deadline for the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals approaches, countries have come together to agree upon a new set of development goals, which will be launched also in New York this month. The survival, health and well-being of women, children and adolescents is at the heart of this agenda, and the new Global Strategy to prevent deaths and improve the [health](#) of millions of women, children and adolescents will provide a platform for the achievement of these new goals.

The new Global Strategy builds on new evidence and lessons learnt. It focuses on reaching everyone, in particular critical population groups many of whom live in humanitarian and fragile settings - where a majority of these deaths happen.

More information: Towards a new Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health, The *BMJ*, 2015.

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