

# Childhood deaths at record low, but progress 'precarious': UN

March 13 2024

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The number of children worldwide who died before age five reached a record low in 2022, the United Nations said in a report published Tuesday, as for the first time fewer than five million died.

According to the estimate, 4.9 million children died before their fifth birthday in 2022, a 51 percent decrease since 2000 and a 62 percent drop since 1990, according to the report, which still warned such progress is "precarious" and unequal.

"There is a lot of good news, and the major one is that we have come to a historic level of under-five mortality, which... reached under 5 million for the first time, so it is 4.9 million per year," Helga Fogstad, director of health at the UN children's agency UNICEF, told AFP.

According to the report, prepared by UNICEF in conjunction with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank, progress was particularly notable in developing countries such as Malawi, Rwanda and Mongolia, where early childhood mortality has fallen by more than 75 percent since 2000.

"Behind these numbers lie the stories of midwives and skilled health personnel helping mothers safely deliver their newborns... vaccinating... children against deadly diseases, and (making) [home visits](#) to support families," UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell said in a statement.

But "this is a precarious achievement," the report warned. "Progress is at risk of stagnation or reversal unless efforts are taken to neutralize the numerous threats to newborn and [child health](#) and survival."

Researchers pointed to already worrying signs, saying that reduction in under-five deaths has slowed at the global level and notably in the sub-Saharan Africa region.

## **Preventable deaths**

In total, 162 million children under the age of five have died since 2000,

72 million of whom perished in the [first month of life](#), as complications related to birth are among the main causes of early childhood mortality.

Between the ages of one month and five years, respiratory infections, malaria and diarrhea become the main killers—ailments which are all preventable, the report points out.

In order to reach the UN's goal of reducing under-five deaths to 25 per 1,000 births by 2030, 59 countries will need urgent investment in children's health, researchers warned. And without adequate funding, 64 countries will miss the goal of limiting first-month deaths to 12 per 1,000 births.

"These are not just numbers on a page; they represent real lives cut short," the report said.

The numbers also reveal glaring inequalities across the world, as the sub-Saharan Africa region accounted for half of all deaths of children under age five in 2022.

A baby born in countries with high early childhood mortality, such as Chad, Nigeria or Somalia, is 80 times more likely to die before their fifth birthday than a baby born in countries with low childhood [mortality](#) rates, such as Finland, Japan and Singapore.

"Where a child is born should not dictate whether they live or die," WHO head Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said.

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Citation: Childhood deaths at record low, but progress 'precarious': UN (2024, March 13) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-03-childhood-deaths-precarious.html>

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