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General News

GHS continues cholera vaccination in Western Region; exercise slated to end Dec 19

By Andy Ogbarmey-Tettey

The Ghana Health Service (GHS) on Sunday, December 15, launched a mass cholera vaccination campaign in the Western Region, scheduled to conclude on Thursday, December 19. Earlier this month, Ghana conducted its first sub-national cholera vaccination campaign in the Awutu Senya East sub-districts of the Central Region between November 30 and December 3.

The exercise targeted an estimated 150,000 people and exceeded its goal, marking a significant milestone in the country's efforts to control the outbreak.

The current initiative targets four

Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies (MMDAs) that have been severely affected by the ongoing cholera outbreak.

To ensure widespread coverage, vaccination teams will be deployed to high-priority areas such as churches, mosques, markets, homes, and schools. These locations have been identified as highly vulnerable to the spread of the disease.

The vaccination campaign aims to immunize over 600,000 residents aged two and above in the Shama Municipality, Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis, Ahanta West, and Effia-Kwesimintsim.

Pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers, however,

will be excluded from the exercise. This decision follows a surge in cholera cases and fatalities, particularly in the Western and Central Regions.

So far, eight MMDAs in the Western Region have recorded

908 confirmed cases, resulting in 10 deaths.

The current campaign reflects the GHS's continued commitment to curbing the cholera outbreak and protecting public health in affected areas.



File Photo

NSA seeks second injunction to block The Fourth Estate's shocking exposé

By Abigail Twumwaa Ampofo

The National Service Authority (NSA) has once again gone to court, seeking a second injunction to prevent The Fourth Estate from publishing a series of investigative stories set for release this month.

This follows an initial injunction obtained on December 2, 2024, aimed at halting the publication of the investigative series scheduled for December 3, 2024. The NSA contends that the publication could cause irreparable harm to its reputation if the stories are found to be false, and it insists on being included in the report.

In its court filing, the NSA argued, "The reputations of the applicant [NSA] and its management will be soiled if the respondents [MFWA and others] are allowed to proceed with their threatened publication. If it later turns out to be a false story, the injury and reputational damage occasioned cannot be reversed."

The Fourth Estate has reportedly made multiple attempts to engage with NSA officials through official

letters, in-person meetings, and phone calls, offering them an opportunity to respond to the investigative findings. However, NSA officials are said to have delayed these efforts and instead resorted to legal action to prevent the publication of the reports.

On December 2, 2024, just 12 hours before the first report was due to be published, a court bailiff served an injunction to the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), the organization behind The Fourth Estate. This injunction, filed by the NSA, blocked the release of the investigative reports. The 10-day injunction expired on December 12, 2024, but the NSA has now returned to court, seeking further legal action.

This time, the NSA is requesting that the court prevent The Fourth Estate from publishing the reports on social media, in newspapers, or on any other platforms until the NSA is included in the process. Additionally, NSA officials are seeking an order for The Fourth Estate to retract its yet-to-be-published report across all social

media platforms and newspapers. They also want The Fourth Estate to bear the costs of the litigation.

Meanwhile, The Fourth Estate's investigation into the NSA has uncovered evidence of systemic corruption and mismanagement. Key findings include the creation

of thousands of fake student index numbers, discrepancies between publicly announced and parliamentary figures for personnel deployment, the enrollment and posting of over-aged individuals, and the use of fake or ineligible identification cards for enrollment.





General News

Ghana is on track to exceed IMF's GDP growth projection of 4% for 2024 - Finance Ministry

By Andy Ogbarmey-Tettey

The Ministry of Finance has stated that Ghana is on course to surpass the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) 2024 GDP growth projection of 4%.

The Ministry in a statement noted that the country continues to exceed expectations, defying challenges and solidifying its position as one of the most dynamic economies in the Africa region due to remarkable economic performance during the third quarter of 2024.

For the first three quarters of 2024, Ghana recorded an impressive average real GDP growth rate of 6.3%, a significant leap from the 2.6% recorded during the same period in 2023, according to the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS).

This growth was fueled by quarterly expansions of 4.8% in Q1, 7.0% in Q2, and an outstanding 7.2% in Q3—the highest quarterly GDP growth in the last five years. The non-oil sector has been equally robust, posting an average growth rate of 6.2% for the first three quarters of 2024, compared to 2.6% in the same period last year. Quarterly growth figures for

the non-oil economy were 4.3% in Q1, 6.6% in Q2, and 7.7% in Q3.

Given this stellar performance, Ghana is on track to exceed the recently revised GDP growth projection of 4% for 2024 under the 3rd Review of the IMF-supported Programme. Ghana's post-debt restructuring growth defies global trends, where such economies typically grow at a modest 1-2%.

The Industry sector led the way with an average growth of 8.9% for the first three quarters, driven by strong performances in key sub-sectors. Mining and Quarrying recorded 15.0% growth while Construction expanded by 9.0%. The Oil and Gas sector saw an average growth of 8.6%, and Manufacturing posted 3.1% growth.

The Services sector expanded by 5.0%, buoyed by key areas such as Information and Communication, which grew by 15.9%. Financial and Insurance Activities recorded growth of 6.9%, while Accommodation and Food Services grew by 5.7%. Transport and Storage also contributed, recording growth of 3.8%.

The Agriculture sector grew

by 4.6%, with significant contributions from the Crops sub-sector, which expanded by 4.6%. The livestock sub-sector recorded a steady growth rate of 4.7%.

The remarkable growth trajectory could be sustained through strategic government initiatives aimed at enhancing economic resilience and improving the living standards of all Ghanaians. Key programmes include the Planting for Food and Jobs Phase 2 Programme, SME Growth and Opportunity Programme, One District, One Factory Programme, Economic Enclave Programme, and the Ghana CARES Programme.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has revised Ghana's growth rate for 2024 to 4% from 3%. Director of the African Department, Abebe Aemro Selassie, noted that the 3% projection, as captured in the World Economic Outlook, was based on mid-April 2024 data and did not factor in recent developments in Ghana.

Ghana's economic resurgence underscores its unwavering commitment to fiscal consolidation, debt restructuring, and inclusive growth. This performance not only highlights the country's resilience but also its ability to lead the charge in economic recovery across the region.



Mohammed Amin Adam, Finance Minister

Mahama vows to have 'dedicated funding' to sustain, fix Free SHS policy

By Abigail Twumwaa Ampofo

President-elect John Dramani Mahama has pledged to secure dedicated funding to sustain and address the challenges facing Ghana's Free Senior High School (Free SHS) policy.

He strongly rejected claims during the election campaign that his administration would abolish the initiative, describing such accusations as baseless political propaganda from supporters of the New Patriotic Party (NPP).

In an interview with Voice of America (VOA) on December 14, Mahama stated, "Free SHS has come to stay, and it is not going anywhere. Nobody is going to scrap Free SHS. What was said was political talk and gimmickry. We are going to maintain it. What

we are going to do is get dedicated funding for it."

Introduced in 2017 under the Akufo-Addo administration, the Free SHS policy provides free education, boarding, and meals to students in public senior high schools. The policy has opened doors for many Ghanaian youths, particularly those from disadvantaged communities, to access secondary education. However, it has faced challenges, including overcrowded classrooms, inadequate facilities, and delays in funding, which have hindered its full effectiveness.

Mahama has committed to addressing these issues by securing reliable funding to improve the policy's implementation and ensure a higher quality of

education for students.

His stance on maintaining the Free SHS program resonated with many Ghanaians, and his decisive victory in the December 7 elections confirmed public support for his plans. The Electoral Commission

(EC) announced Mahama as the winner with 6,328,397 votes, representing 56.55% of the total valid votes cast. He defeated his closest contender, Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia of the NPP, who secured 4,657,304 votes, or 41.61%.



John Dramani Mahama, President Elect

General News

Ghana's WOI Oduro-Korankye makes history with Best Achiever, International Learner Awards

By Andy Ogbarmey-Tettey

Warrant Officer Class One (WOI) Oduro-Korankye Fred of Headquarters Support Services Command has made history by receiving the Best Achiever Award and being adjudged the Best International Learner at the 2024 Joint Warrant Officers Course.

WOI Oduro-Korankye becomes the first West African representative to participate in the prestigious Joint Warrant Officers Course at the South African Warrant Officers Academy.

The programme, which brought together senior military personnel from South Africa, Ghana, Brazil, Uganda, and other countries, focused on enhancing skills in

Multi-National Safety and Security Operations Management.

The awards recognize WOI Oduro-Korankye's exceptional performance and dedication throughout the course, setting a new standard of excellence for Ghana and the broader West African military community.

His achievements highlight the critical role of professional development and collaboration in modern security and defense management.

In an interview, WOI Oduro-Korankye expressed gratitude for the opportunity to represent Ghana and pledged to share the advanced skills and knowledge he acquired with fellow service personnel.

He emphasized the importance of enhancing operational readiness within the Ghana Armed Forces (GAF) to tackle evolving security challenges effectively.

WOI Oduro-Korankye's historic achievement underscores Ghana's commitment to advancing military

professionalism and highlights the country's role as a rising force in global security cooperation. His success is expected to inspire other military personnel to pursue excellence on both regional and international platforms.



Fred Oduro-Korankye, Warrant Officer Class One

EC to recollate results of Dome Kwabenya, Okaikwei Central, 2 others over unlawful declaration

By Abigail Twumwaa Ampofo

The Electoral Commission (EC) has announced plans to re-collate parliamentary results for Dome Kwabenya, Okaikwei Central, Ablekuma North, and Tema Central constituencies, citing unlawful declarations in those areas.

Samuel Tettey, Deputy EC Chair for Operations, disclosed this at a press briefing in Accra on Friday, explaining that the results were declared under duress and in violation of electoral procedures.

The National Democratic Congress (NDC) parliamentary candidates previously declared winners in the affected constituencies are Faustina Elikplim Akurugu (Dome Kwabenya), Abdulai Abu Baba Abubakar Sadiq (Okaikwei Central), Ewurabena Aubynn (Ablekuma North), and Ebi Bright (Tema Central).

Mr. Tettey stated that the collation process in these constituencies did not adhere to the established procedures outlined in CI 127. He revealed that despite police presence, party supporters besieged the collation centres,

disrupted proceedings, and coerced EC officials into announcing results in favour of their preferred candidates.

"It is important to note that the re-collation in the constituencies of Dome Kwabenya, Okaikwei Central, Ablekuma North, and Tema Central did not follow the laid-down processes enshrined in CI 127," Mr. Tettey said.

He added, "In all four instances,

EC officials were threatened and compelled to declare winners without adhering to the required procedures. These collation and declarations are, therefore, illegal and cannot be upheld by the Commission."

Mr. Tettey further noted that the EC has successfully completed re-collation in Suhum, Akwatia, and Fanteakwa North, while the process remains pending in

Ahafo Ano South West, Ahafo Ano North, Obuasi East, and Techiman South.

He assured the public that the EC is committed to addressing the irregularities and conducting a transparent, lawful collation process in all affected areas.

The EC urged stakeholders to remain calm as it works to resolve the issues in line with the law.



Samuel Tetteh, Deputy EC Chair



General News

Pikworo Heritage and Slave Camp positioned to boost tourism this festive season after refurbishment

By Andy Ogbarmey-Tettey

The Pikworo Heritage and Slave Camp, located at Nania near Paga in the Kassena-Nankana West District of the Upper East Region, is set to attract more tourists and boost the local economy following its recent redevelopment, commissioned by the Ghana Tourism Authority (GTA).

The refurbishment project includes the construction of a perimeter wall, frontage, summer huts, washrooms, and an administration block with a waiting area, reception, manager's room, and a souvenirs display room. Remaining works include fencing, a graveyard, and landscaping.

This initiative is part of the broader effort by the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture, through the GTA, to beautify tourist sites across the country, particularly those tied to the slave trade, with funding from the Tourism Development Fund.

The redevelopment aims to preserve the history and heritage of the region, attract more

visitors, and act as a catalyst for job creation and socioeconomic development, especially for local communities.

At the commissioning ceremony, Mr. Benjamin Anane, Deputy Chief Executive Officer of GTA in charge of General Services, emphasized that the government is committed to redeveloping all of the country's tourist sites to boost visitation and revenue.

"Tourism is one of the major foreign exchange earners of countries globally due to its value chain linkages," he noted. He called for strategic investment in the tourism sector to ensure its sustainable development.

"Ghana is the leading tourist destination in West Africa but on the global scale, it is not particularly exciting because we are number eight in Sub-Saharan Africa and our target is to get to the top-five in the next five years," Mr. Anane added.

He stressed that achieving this goal would require collective efforts from communities, traditional authorities, local governance structures, and the GTA to

identify potential tourist sites and products, and invest sustainably in their development.

"Every country has a strong point... in Ghana, it is a mix-bag of many things but strong among them is our connection to the African diaspora through the Atlantic slave trade," he explained. "Heritage sites such as this become important to sustain the diversity of interest in our tourism and also encourage domestic tourists to actively engage and explore the country."

Mr. Wisdom Ahadzi, Upper East Regional Director of GTA, reinforced the idea that tourism development requires a collective approach. He urged the community to take ownership of the site and contribute to realizing its full benefits.

Mr. Gerard Ataogye, District Chief Executive of Kassena-Nankana West, praised the government for its investment in the Pikworo Heritage and Slave Camp, noting that it would help increase visitation, boost the local economy, and create jobs for the youth. He called for private partnerships

to further develop other local attractions such as the crocodile ponds and Kukla shrine to drive economic growth.

Pe Asangchera Thomas Aluah, Divisional Chief of Kazigu, representing Pe Pwanalonga Charles Awiah Awampaga II, Paramount Chief of the Paga Traditional Area, highlighted the historical significance of the Pikworo Slave and Heritage Camp. He encouraged the public to visit the site and learn more about the history of the slave trade.

A five-member committee was inaugurated to oversee the operations of the newly refurbished site, ensuring its long-term success as a tourism hub.



Pikworo Slave Camp

Assist us resolve energy sector crisis; our economy is on the line - Mahama to UK govt

By Abigail Twumwaa Ampofo

President-elect John Dramani Mahama has called on the British government to assist in addressing Ghana's worsening energy sector crisis.

The appeal was made during a courtesy call by the British High Commissioner to Ghana, Harriet Thompson, on Saturday, December 14, at Mr. Mahama's office in Accra.

Mr. Mahama expressed gratitude for the United Kingdom's ongoing support for Ghana's development and highlighted the urgent need for intervention to stabilize the energy sector.

"If we don't do something about the energy sector, it could crash everything we are doing. So, as

quickly as possible, we want to look at what assistance we can get across the entire energy sector value chain to ensure a more sustainable sector going forward," he noted.

Ghana's energy sector is currently in a critical state, plagued by years of mismanagement, inefficiency, and poor financial oversight. Finance Minister Dr. Mohammed Amin Adam recently revealed that the sector faces a staggering financing gap of \$1.9 billion, which is now estimated to have grown to \$2.5 billion (equivalent to over GH¢35 billion). This highlights the scale of the crisis.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has also urged the Ghanaian government to overhaul

the governance framework of the sector to address persistent challenges, including irregular electricity supply.

During the meeting, High Commissioner Thompson congratulated Mr. Mahama on his electoral victory and reaffirmed the UK government's commitment to strengthening bilateral relations with Ghana.

"Your 120-day plan and our interests coincide, particularly in the areas of health, education, economic growth, and job creation," she stated.

The two leaders discussed key issues, including trade, investment, and development cooperation. They also explored opportunities to deepen collaboration in

critical areas such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure development.

Mr. Mahama's 120-day plan aims to reset the country's economic and social policies, with a focus on tackling pressing issues such as the energy crisis.

The meeting underscored the shared commitment between Ghana and the UK to work together towards sustainable growth and development.



John Dramani Mahama, President Elect

General News

On-going recruitment and payment not illegal - Govt's transition team dispels claims

By Abigail Twumwaa Ampofo

The government's Transition Team has denied allegations of irregular recruitment and payment activities by the outgoing administration, following concerns raised by the President-elect, John Dramani Mahama, and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) Transition Team.

The allegations stem from claims that the outgoing government is making last-minute appointments and fast-tracking recruitment processes, particularly for New Patriotic Party (NPP) supporters, ahead of the formal handover of power.

During a media engagement on Wednesday, December 11, Felix Kwakye Ofose, spokesperson for the President-elect's Transition Team, criticized the outgoing government for disregarding the precedent set in 2016, when the NPP sent letters to the NDC government requesting a halt to all recruitment activities.

"It has come to our attention that quite a number of state agencies are engaging in last-minute recruitment. These appointments are being done hurriedly, with NPP

supporters being pushed through the system to gain employment just before they leave power," Mr. Kwakye Ofose stated.

In response, the government's Transition Team, in a statement issued on Friday, December 13, clarified that both sides had agreed to review major payments, recruitment, and similar activities on a case-by-case basis.

The team rejected the allegations of wrongdoing, emphasizing that all recruitment processes followed legal procedures and had received the necessary approvals.

"Any specific allegations of illegality regarding any particular payment or recruitment should be brought to the attention of the Transition Team for a decision to be made," said Fatimatu Abubakar, spokesperson for the Government's Transition Team.

She dismissed rumors that all recruitment and payments had been halted, describing such claims as untrue and urging the public to disregard them.

Fatimatu Abubakar further assured that the outgoing government is committed to a smooth and transparent transition

process. "We remain dedicated to passing the baton to the incoming government on January 7, 2025," she reiterated.

Meanwhile, the joint Transition Team has indicated that a committee will be established to investigate concerns raised over last-minute recruitment into various ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs).

On the matter, Senior Lecturer at the University of Ghana Business School (UGBS), Dr. George Acheampong, has warned against canceling all contracts indiscriminately. He said this could exacerbate the country's current financial crisis.

The advice follows calls from some civil society organizations in the extractive industry, urging the new government to end the contract between the Ghana Revenue Authority and SML, cancel the Agyapa Royalty Deal, and review the Minerals Income Investment Fund, among other requests.

While acknowledging that some contracts may lack transparency and deserve review, he cautions against canceling all of them, as it

could lead to financial burdens like judgment debts and destabilize vital Ghanaian businesses.

"We cannot afford to destabilize Ghanaian businesses; they are key to our economic sovereignty. He concludes with a call to the incoming administration: Act cautiously, review contracts comprehensively, and ensure the decisions are inclusive, involving all relevant stakeholders. The ultimate goal is to maximize value for the Ghanaian people."



Fatimatu Abubakar, Spokesperson, Govt Transitional Team

Water shortage hits Greater Kumasi Metropolis as GWCL workers strike over demolition of residence

By Andy Ogbarmey-Tettey

An acute water shortage has hit the Greater Kumasi Metropolis, leaving residents struggling to access water for domestic and commercial purposes. The crisis follows the suspension of operations by workers of the Ghana Water Limited (GWL) in the Ashanti Region.

The shutdown, which began on Friday, was in protest over the demolition of residences and properties in the Ridge Residential Area, which the workers claim belong to the company.

The fences of two residences, occupied by top managers of Ghana Water Limited, were reportedly pulled down by a

private developer, sparking outrage among the staff.

"Recently, we witnessed the unnecessary demolition of two directors' fence walls of their bungalows and boys' quarters, which raises serious questions about the procedures and respect that should govern our operations. These properties are not merely structures; they represent the hard work, dedication, and commitment of our leadership to this organization," said Emmanuel Okpoti, Vice Chair of the Senior Staff Association of Ghana Water Limited in Ashanti.

The water shortage has severely affected homes across the Ashanti Region, with areas such as Atonsu in Kumasi particularly hard-hit. Many residents have been forced

to resort to wells and underground water sources to meet their daily needs.

Residents are spending valuable time searching for water, which is impacting productivity and causing frustration. As such there

are growing calls for an amicable resolution to the impasse between the Ghana Water Limited and the relevant authorities to restore water supply and alleviate the hardship on affected communities.



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Business

Ghana to end 2024 with 18% inflation rate - IMF

By Andy Ogbarmey-Tettey

Ghana's inflation rate is projected to reach 18% by the end of 2024, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has revealed in its latest Country Report. This marks an upward revision from its earlier estimate of 15%, reflecting persistent price pressures caused by a weaker cedi and the ongoing dry spell.

The IMF noted that despite these challenges, Ghana's macroeconomic outlook remains positive, buoyed by stronger-than-expected GDP growth in the second quarter of 2024. The Fund has consequently revised its 2024 growth projection upward to 4.0% from the earlier forecast of 3.1%, made during the second Economic Credit Facility (ECF) review.

"Continued tight monetary policy will bring inflation back to the Bank of Ghana's target band (8±2 percent) by end-2025," the IMF stated, underlining the importance of maintaining fiscal discipline to

curb inflationary pressures.

The IMF's analysis also highlighted ongoing fiscal consolidation efforts and the anticipated completion of Ghana's debt restructuring as critical measures for ensuring public debt sustainability. It further projected that the country's current account deficit would remain balanced until 2026, with international reserves expected to reach three months of import coverage.

Despite the improved outlook, the IMF cautioned that significant downside risks remain. Externally, heightened geopolitical tensions in regions such as Ukraine and the Middle East, coupled with commodity price volatility, could adversely affect Ghana's economy. These factors may lead to higher imported inflation and increased investor risk aversion.

On the domestic front, the IMF warned of potential policy slippages ahead of the 2024 general elections or during the

political transition period. Such setbacks, it said, could undermine macroeconomic stability, complicate debt restructuring discussions, and worsen domestic financing conditions.

"If protracted, weak cocoa harvests could affect exports and growth prospects. More generally, Ghana is subject to risks related to climate shocks," the IMF added.

The Fund also expressed concerns that the disinflationary process is progressing at a slower pace than anticipated in the first half of 2024, while exchange rate volatility remains elevated.

Former Finance Minister Seth Terkper has weighed in on

the IMF's latest assessment, describing it as a positive signal for Ghana's economy.

However, he emphasized that these improvements do not imply that all sectors of the economy are performing well.

Ghana's inflation outlook remains central to its economic recovery strategy, with policymakers expected to maintain tight monetary policies to steer inflation back to target levels. As the year progresses, the government's ability to navigate risks and implement prudent economic policies will determine the resilience of Ghana's recovery.



IMF Logo

Falsehood peddlers will be dragged to court - ADB warns over employment termination

By Andy Ogbarmey-Tettey

The Agricultural Development Bank PLC (ADB) has issued a strong warning to individuals or entities spreading falsehoods regarding the recent termination of employment for some staff members.

The Bank emphasized that it would not hesitate to pursue legal action against anyone propagating malicious claims aimed at tarnishing its reputation and that of its Deputy Managing Director, Mrs. Eno Ofori-Atta.

In a press release, ADB categorically refuted the allegations, describing them as baseless, defamatory, and designed to undermine its credibility. The Bank reiterated its commitment to professionalism, transparency, and adherence to regulatory standards.

According to ADB, the termination decisions were made by its Board of Directors during a duly convened regular meeting, in full compliance with all relevant laws, regulations, and internal policies.

"She [Mrs. Eno Ofori-Atta] has consistently upheld the principles of integrity and diligence, which are central to the Bank's operations," the statement affirmed, lauding her professionalism and exemplary performance since assuming her role as Deputy Managing Director.

The Bank urged the public to disregard the misinformation and treat it with the contempt it deserves, labeling the allegations as "malicious attempts to undermine the Bank's reputation."

"ADB remains focused on its core mission and will not allow baseless

accusations to distract from its goals. The Bank will not hesitate to pursue legal action against individuals or entities propagating these falsehoods," the statement concluded.

Furthermore, ADB reaffirmed its unwavering commitment

to driving economic growth through agriculture and other developmental initiatives. It assured stakeholders of its resolve to maintain trust, professionalism, and high operational standards while encouraging the public to support its mission.



ADB Signage



Business

WHO records 38% drop in the global drowning death rate

By WHO

The World Health Organization (WHO) publishes its first-ever report on drowning prevention, which reveals a 38% drop in the global drowning death rate since 2000—a major global health achievement.

However, the report notes that drowning remains a major public health issue with more than 30 people estimated to be drowning every hour and 300 000 people dying by drowning in 2021 alone. Almost half of all drowning deaths occur among people below the age of 29 years, and a quarter occur among children under the age of 5 years. Children without adult supervision are at an especially high risk of drowning.

“The significant decline in drowning deaths since 2000 is great news and proof that the simple, practical interventions that WHO recommends work,” said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General. “Still, every drowning death is one death too many, and millions of people remain at risk. This report contains crucial data for policy-making and recommendations for urgent action to save lives.”

Progress in reducing drowning has been uneven. At the global level, 9 in 10 drowning deaths take place in low- and middle-income countries. The WHO European Region saw a 68% drop in drowning death rate between 2000 and 2021, yet the rate fell by just 3% in the WHO African Region, which has the highest rate of any region with 5.6 deaths per 100 000 people. This may be influenced by the levels of national commitments to address the issue: within the African Region, only 15% of countries had a national strategy or plan for drowning prevention, compared to 45% of countries in the European Region.

“Drowning continues to be a major public health issue, but progress is possible, particularly if governments work with strong partners at the local level,”

said Michael R. Bloomberg, founder of Bloomberg L.P. and Bloomberg Philanthropies, WHO Global Ambassador for Noncommunicable Diseases and Injuries, and 108th mayor of New York City. “For more than a decade, Bloomberg Philanthropies has supported governments and local organizations that are leading effective drowning prevention efforts. This new report shows what more countries can do to help save thousands of lives every year.”

Clear guidance to reduce deaths outlined but uptake varies

More than 7.2 million people, mainly children, could die by drowning by the year 2050 if current trends continue. Yet most drowning deaths could be prevented by implementing WHO-recommended interventions.

WHO recommends a series of community-based actions for drowning prevention, which include:

the installation of barriers to prevent child access to water;

provision of safe places away from water for pre-school children, teaching school-aged children basic swimming water safety and safe rescue skills;

training people in rescue and

resuscitation;

strengthening public awareness on drowning; setting and enforcing safe boating, shipping and ferry regulations; and improving flood risk management.

The report found WHO’s evidence-based drowning prevention interventions are being implemented to varying degrees.

Encouragingly, 73% of countries have search and rescue services, and a further 73% implement community-based flood risk mitigation programmes

However, only 33% of countries offer national programmes to train bystanders in safe rescue and resuscitation, and just 22% integrate swimming and water safety training into their school curricula

Accurate data is critical to inform prevention strategies, yet only 65% of countries report collecting drowning data through civil registration and vital statistics systems. Quality data is further required to compellingly raise awareness on the issue and mobilize governments and communities to take action.

The report identifies strengths and shortfalls in policy and legislation:

While 81% of countries have laws on passenger safety for travelling by boat:

Just 44% of these laws require regular safety inspections of the boats, and

Only 66% of countries mandate lifejacket use for recreational boating and transport on water;

Of concern, 86% of countries lack laws for fencing around swimming pools, which is key to preventing child drowning in certain settings.

This report, developed in response to a Member State request made through World Health Assembly Resolution 76.18 (2023), summarizes achievements and challenges towards drowning prevention at the global level and provides a benchmark for which progress can be tracked. This comprehensive report highlights that drowning prevention requires a coordinated, whole-of-society response. Through increased collaboration and investment, those most vulnerable to drowning can be protected to ensure the promising trends currently observed are experienced uniformly and equitably.



Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General

International

UNICEF says birth registration improving but millions of children remain “invisible”

By Africanews

The United Nations children's agency, UNICEF, said there has been a welcome increase in the number of children worldwide who have had their births registered.

In a new report published recently, it says close to 80 per cent of youngsters under five were registered in the past five years.

“We celebrate the progress made for millions of children in gaining their right to a legal identity, while calling for stronger efforts to ensure that every child, is registered at birth,” said its executive director, Catherine Russell.

However, the agency says some 150 million children remain “invisible” to government systems, with more than half of these in sub-Saharan Africa.

“Birth registration ensures children

are immediately recognised under the law, providing a foundation for protection from harm and exploitation, as well as access to essential services like vaccines, healthcare, and education,” she said.

UNICEF also found that over 50 million children who have been recorded, still don't have birth certificates.

This essential document serves as proof of registration and is critical for acquiring nationality, preventing statelessness, and ensuring children can enjoy their rights from birth.

The agency said global progress has largely been driven by countries prioritising timely registration, leveraging health, social protection, and education systems, expanding services to more locations, digitalising the

process, and eliminating fees.

Within sub-Saharan Africa, progress and levels vary widely.

Southern Africa leads with 88 per cent, while Western Africa has made the most significant gains over 15 years, reaching 63 per cent. Eastern Africa and Middle Africa trail behind, both at 41 per cent.

However, sub-Saharan Africa is poised to house the majority of the world's children in the coming decades.

UNICEF said with slow improvements and this rapidly growing child population, there could be over 100 million unregistered children after 2030 if levels remain as they are today.

It said many families around the world continue to face barriers due to weak political commitment,

long distances, and multiple visits to registration facilities.

Lack of knowledge about the registration process, unaffordable fees, and prohibitive indirect costs, and in some places, discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, or religion also play a role.

Despite these challenges, some countries have made significant gains. In sub-Saharan Africa, Botswana has achieved universal birth registration, while Côte d'Ivoire has reached over 90 per cent.

Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, and others have also shown sustained improvement over the past decade. These success stories serve as valuable models for other countries to emulate.



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