



How much progress are we making on the world's biggest problems? Take this quiz on plans to save humanity.

The United Nations has ambitious aims to end poverty and clean up the planet by 2030. See whether you know how the world is faring on the Sustainable Development Goals.

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By Ehsan Masood & Richard Van Noorden

In September 2015, representatives of 193 nations met in New York City to tackle the globe's biggest problems. They broke these down into 169 targets under 17 broad goals, such as ending hunger and poverty, cleaning up the environment and providing health care for all — and made the ambitious pledge to achieve these goals by 2030. We're now halfway towards that

mark: how close is the world to reaching the targets? Test your knowledge of these crucial issues by taking this quiz, which explores progress on eight of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Ending poverty

Let's start with the UN's goal to end poverty. In 2000, **29%** of the global population, or

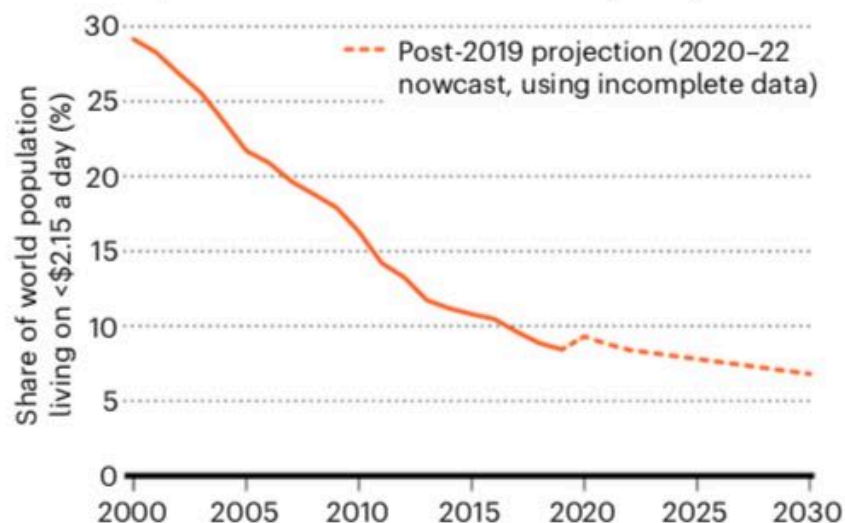
1.78 billion people, lived in 'extreme poverty', currently defined as living on less than US\$2.15 a day (in 2017 prices).

About what proportion of the world's population now lives in extreme poverty?

The correct answer is **about 10%**.

PROPORTION OF WORLD IN EXTREME POVERTY

The pandemic set back years of progress in reducing the proportion of people living on less than US\$2.15 a day (constant 2017 values) — the UN's definition for extreme poverty.



POVERTY BY REGION

The majority of the world's people in extreme poverty live in sub-Saharan Africa.



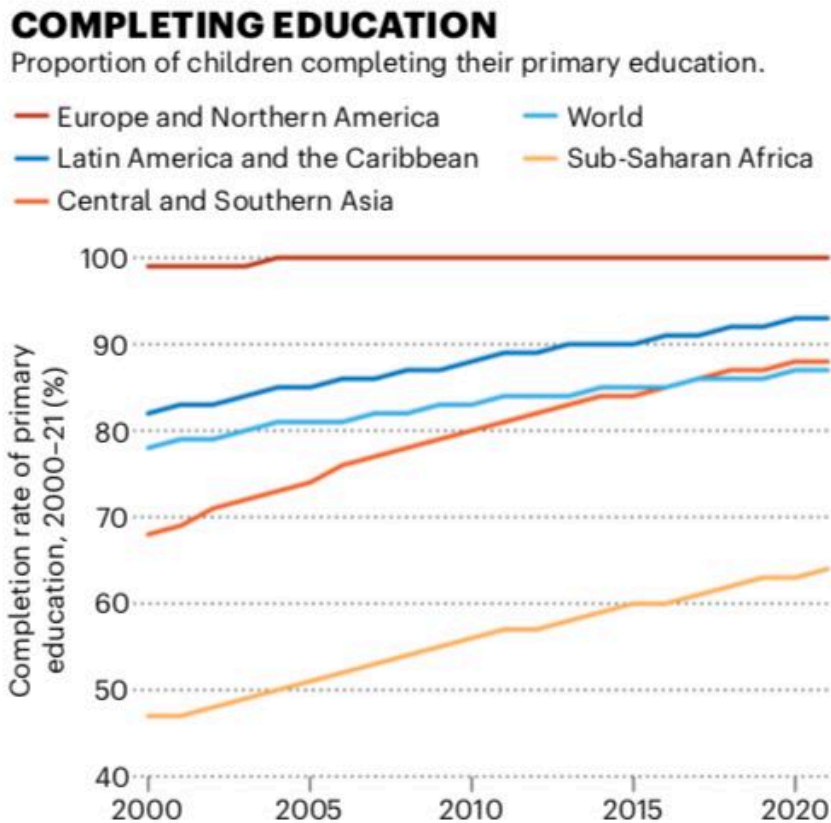
Education for all

Let's move to education. In 2000, **78%** of the world's children completed their primary education.

The correct answer is **around 85%**.

The primary-school completion rate reached **87%** in 2021 (it is 77% in lower secondary and 58% in upper secondary education). These improvement rates had slowed even before the COVID-19 pandemic, and in many countries some children have not returned to schools since lockdowns ended. This

measure is one of ten targets under SDG 4 to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all. Read more: [How to educate the world: prioritize funding and data.](#)



SDG 5

Gender equality

As part of its goal to empower women and girls, the UN

monitors **discriminatory laws** and gaps in legal protection

between men and women across the world.

At current rates of progress, how many years does the UN estimate it will take to close these legal gaps?

The correct answer is **286 years**.

According to the UN, at current rates of progress it will take up to **286 years** to close gaps in legal protection and remove discriminatory laws, **140 years** for women to be represented equally in positions of power and leadership in the workplace, and **47 years** to achieve equal representation in national parliaments across the world. Legal protections are one of nine targets under SDG 5 to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Read more: [Gender equality: the route to a better world](#).

SDG 7

Affordable and clean energy

Next, we come to energy. In **2005**, **54%** of people had access to clean fuels, such as natural gas or electricity, for their cooking.

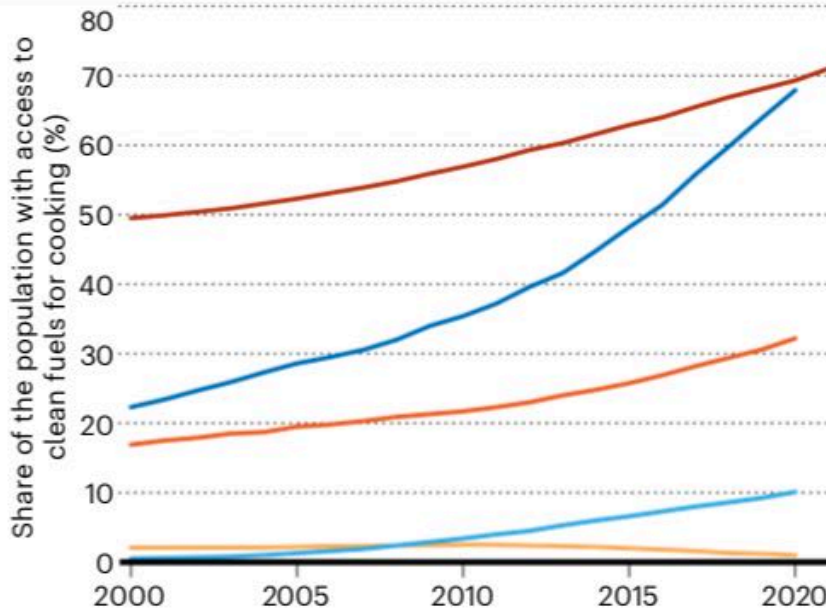
The correct answer is **about 70%**.

Around **71% of people** worldwide (or 5.6 billion) had access to clean fuels in 2021, up from just over half in 2005. However, the UN estimates that, at the current rate, some 2 billion people will still be using polluting fuels such as wood or dung for cooking in 2030, predominantly in sub-Saharan Africa. The World Health Organization estimates that dirty fuels led to more than 3 million deaths in 2020. Ensuring that everyone has access to clean cooking fuels is one of five targets under SDG 7. Read more: [Clean energy can fuel the future — and make the world healthier](#).

ACCESS TO CLEAN COOKING FUEL

Progress has been made on avoiding the need to cook using polluting fuels such as wood or dung, but billions still lack access to clean fuels.

World Sri Lanka Malawi
India Togo



Employment and finance

The UN wants people worldwide to have full and productive employment, which includes ensuring everyone is able to open a **bank account**. In 2011, around half of adults globally had an account with a bank or regulated financial institution.

What is the proportion today?

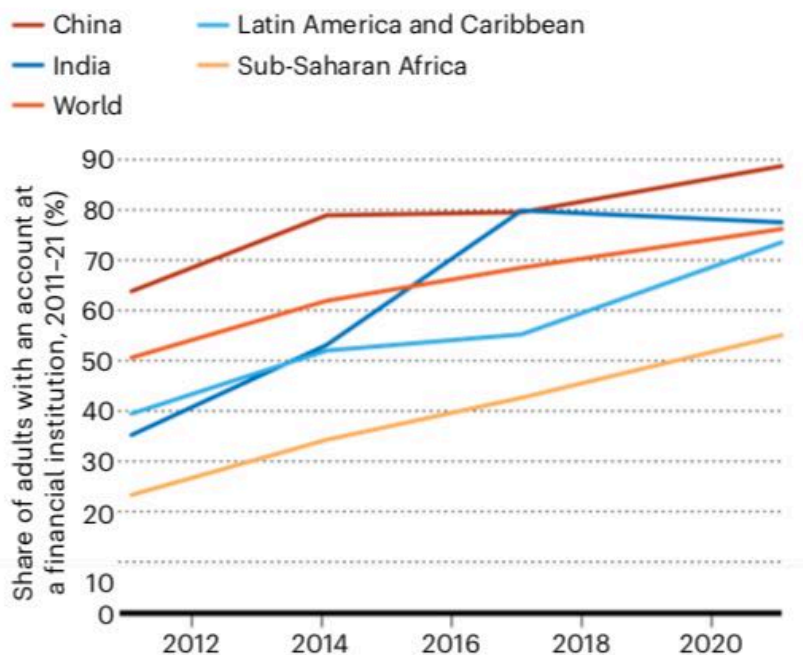
The correct answer is **about three-quarters of adults**.

Just over **three-quarters of adults** (defined as people aged over 15) had a bank account in 2021, according to the latest figures

available, up from around half in 2011. Technology has played an important part in reaching those without accounts, the UN says — particularly the expansion of digital and mobile banking, which has enabled more people to send and receive money directly using mobile phones. There are 12 targets for SDG 8. This goal also includes promoting ‘sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth’, but researchers focused on sustainability are increasingly questioning whether the world’s major measure of economic growth — gross domestic product — needs to be reformed.

ADULTS WITH BANK ACCOUNTS

Mobile phones and digital banking have helped to increase the proportion of people with access to bank accounts.



SDG 11

Safe and sustainable cities

More than half of the world’s 8 billion people live in cities, a proportion that has been steadily rising. In 2000, almost **900**

million people (about 30% of the urban population) were living in informal, unsafe and unhealthy housing, known as slums.

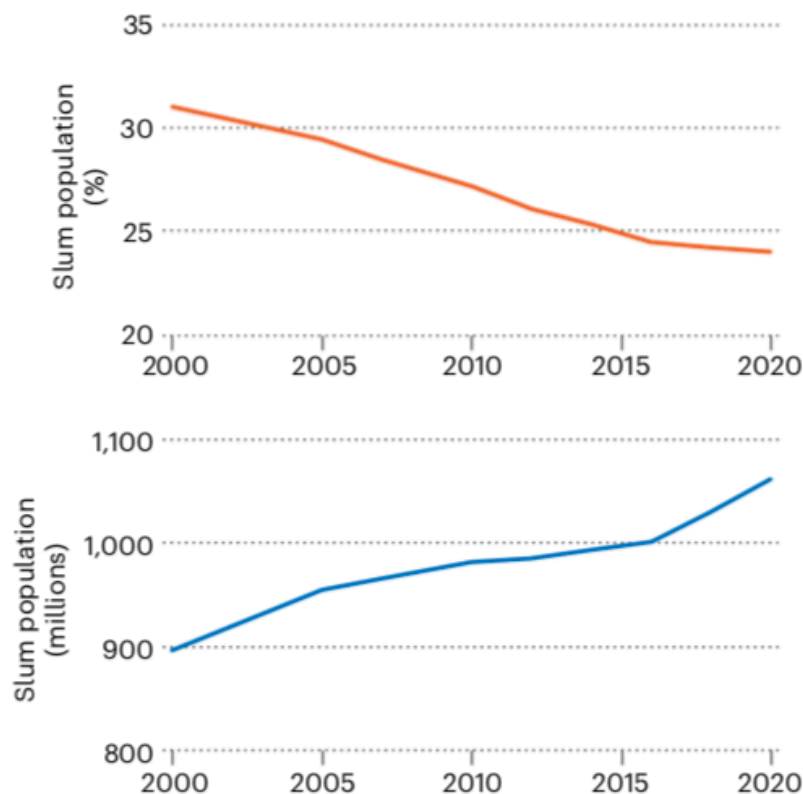
How many people live in slums today?

The correct answer is **about 1.1 billion people**.

The proportion of people living in slums has declined since 2000, from about 30% of the urban population to around 25% in 2020 (the latest figures available). However, the number of people in slums increased to almost **1.1 billion** in 2022. As the global population grows and people continue to move to cities, the UN estimates that an extra 2 billion people will find homes in slums or slum-like conditions over the next 30 years. Access to safe and affordable housing is among ten targets under SDG 11. Read more:

PEOPLE LIVING IN SLUMS

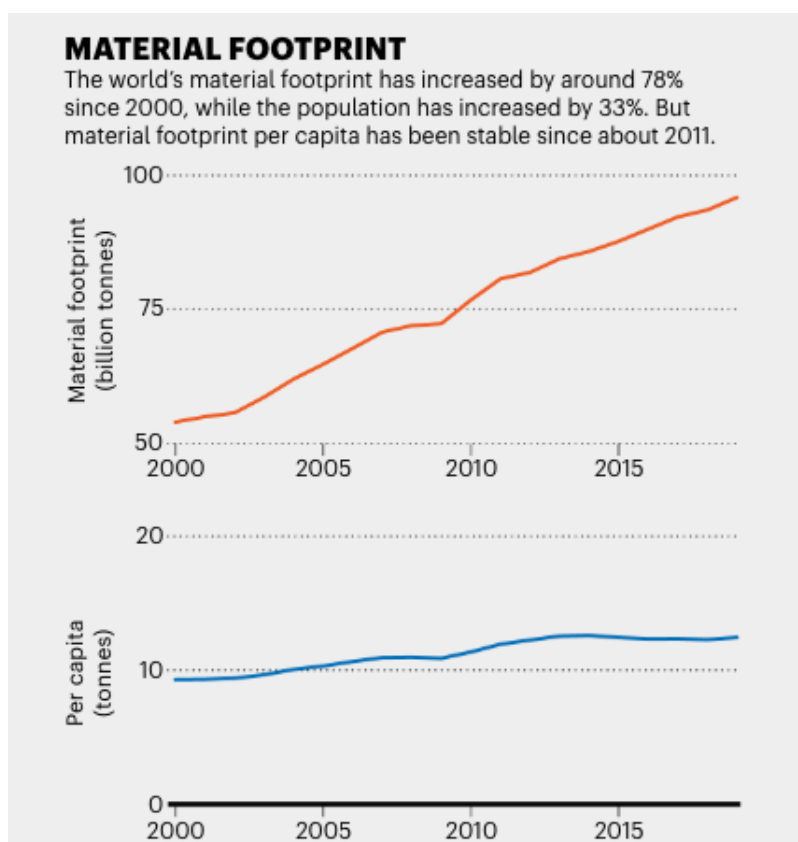
The proportion of the world's urban population living in slum-like conditions has fallen, but as more people move to cities, the number in slums is rising.



Responsible consumption

Reducing and sustainably managing natural resources is another UN goal. In 2000, the world extracted **54 billion tonnes** of raw materials (including fossil fuels, minerals, ores and biomass) to support a global population of around 6 billion.

Roughly what quantity of raw materials is now being extracted every year?



The correct answer is around **95 billion tonnes (as of 2019)**.

The total quantity of raw materials extracted to make the products we all consume is called our material footprint.

It has

risen from 54 billion tonnes in 2000 to around **96 billion tonnes in 2019**. Per capita, however, this measure has been broadly stable at around 12 tonnes since 2011.

Reducing this footprint is one of 11 targets under SDG 12. Read more: [Tackle ever-growing consumption to safeguard sustainability gains](#).

Peace and justice

The penultimate SDG aims for peaceful societies; for everyone to have access to justice; and for public institutions to be **accountable** to people.

How many countries provide the right for people to access public information, also known as freedom of information?

You answered **about 100 countries**. The correct answer is **about 140 countries (as of 2022)**.

The right to access information held by public authorities is a cornerstone of human rights. The number of countries enacting relevant legislation enabling people to access such information has been increasing steadily — up from 105 in 2015 to 136 now. However, according to the UN, by 2019, 40 of these countries had not provided a way for people to appeal to an independent body if an information request was denied. This target is among 12 in SDG 16.