

The state of the world

Read an article about the state of the world to practise and improve your reading skills.

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the text and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary

1. to eradicate
2. to sustain
3. a civilian
4. life expectancy
5. contraception
6. to fuel
7. to be down to
8. optimism

Definitions

- a. to support
- b. to make something increase or become stronger
- c. methods of preventing pregnancy
- d. to make something disappear forever
- e. how long a person is expected to live
- f. positive thinking
- g. someone who is not a soldier
- h. to be the result of

Reading text: The state of the world

If your view of the world comes from watching the news and reading newspapers, you could be forgiven for lying awake at night worrying about the future. Apparently, rising violence and population rates mean humans are both killing each other in ever larger numbers and being born at rates the world's resources can't sustain. To make matters worse, all the wealth is concentrated on a handful of people in the world's richest countries. People in low-income countries live in poverty while the West gets richer. Depressing, isn't it?

But do the statistics support our negative world view or is the world actually improving?

Let's take global population first. It's around 7 billion now, in line with figures predicted by the UN in 1958. By the year 2100, the same experts predict it will be around 11 billion. But did you know that 11 billion is probably as high as that number will get? The rate of increase will slow down in the second half of this century thanks to falling birth rates today.

Falling birth rates? Yes, that's right.

In the last two centuries, improvements in technology and health meant fewer children died young, fuelling rapid population growth. These large families produced even more children who survived into adulthood and had their own children. But with the wider availability of contraception in the 1960s, the global average number of babies per woman has declined from six babies per woman to as low as two.

The biggest factor in child mortality is poverty. And while it's still true that only 20 per cent of the world takes about 74 per cent of the world's income, 60 per cent of the world now falls into a middle-income group, with 11.6 per cent – the smallest amount of people in history – still living in conditions of extreme poverty. If the majority of the world's people have money, international aid could realistically achieve the UN target of eradicating poverty by 2030. As poverty goes down, life expectancy goes up, birth rates go down because parents can expect their existing children to survive, and the global population stabilises.

As for news stories that make us think the world is an increasingly violent place, there is cause for some optimism too. Between the end of World War II and 1990, there were 30 wars that killed more than 100,000 people. Today there are still civil wars, but countries are mostly co-existing more peacefully than in the past. However, terrorism has shot up in the last few years and, since World War II, wars have killed many more civilians than soldiers. Even for civilians, though, the statistics are not all bad. Although deaths are nine times more likely to be a result of violent crime than political conflict, the global murder rate fell slightly, from 8 per 100,000 people in 2000 to about 5.3 in 2015.

Of course, none of this means the world is perfect, and whether you personally are affected by war and poverty is often down to the lottery of where you're born. Also, we still face huge problems of our own making, particularly environmental ones like global warming, and wealth and natural resources need to be distributed more fairly. But not all the news is bad news, whatever the TV and newspapers might say.

Tasks

Task 1

Match the numbers with the facts they represent.

60%	11.6%	20%
11 billion	5.3	74%

1. the expected peak global population
2. the size of the richest group of people
3. the amount of the richest group's income
4. the amount of people who are neither rich nor poor
5. the amount of people with the least money
6. the number of murders per 100,000 people in 2015

Task 2

Circle the best answer.

1. What does the word 'apparently' in the first paragraph tell us about the rise in violence we see in the news?
 - a. The rise is obviously true.
 - b. The rise seems to be true but evidence might show it isn't.
 - c. The rise seems false but evidence might show it's true.

2. Which statement about population levels is correct?
 - a. About two hundred years ago, the child mortality rate dropped significantly.
 - b. The rate is growing steadily now.
 - c. The rate will start to drop in the year 2100.

3. Which factor does NOT cause the birth rate to fall?
 - a. Improvements in healthcare
 - b. The availability of contraception
 - c. Poverty

4. One of the UN's targets for 2030 is to ...
 - a. end poverty.
 - b. increase life expectancy.
 - c. make population levels stable.

5. People are more likely to be killed ...
 - a. by soldiers.
 - b. by politicians.
 - c. by criminals.

6. There is reason to be optimistic because ...
 - a. you might win the lottery.
 - b. there are some positives despite what the newspapers report.
 - c. we're making progress with environmental problems.

Discussion

How optimistic are you about the world?

Answers

Preparation task

1. d
2. a
3. g
4. e
5. c
6. b
7. h
8. f

Task 1

1. 11 billion
2. 20%
3. 74%
4. 60%
5. 11.6%
6. 5.3

Task 2

1. b
2. a
3. c
4. a
5. c
6. b