

The Millennium Development Goals Report



UNITED NATIONS

2015

EMBARGOED UNTIL 6 JULY, 10:15 AM EDT (GMT-4)

REGIONAL BACKGROUNDER

Eastern Asia, South-Eastern Asia and Southern Asia

Eastern Asia and South-Eastern Asia have met or are on track to meet most of the MDG targets. Southern Asia has made remarkable progress in moving towards the achievement of the MDGs in some areas, but increased efforts are needed in many other areas.

By 2011, Asia had met the target of halving the proportion of people who live in extreme poverty. The world's most populous countries, China and India, played a central role in the global reduction of poverty. As a result of progress in China, the extreme poverty rate in Eastern Asia has dropped from 61 per cent in 1990 to only 4 per cent in 2015. Southern Asia's progress is almost as impressive—a decline from 52 per cent to 17 per cent for the same period—and its rate of reduction has accelerated since 2008. South-Eastern Asia has reduced the extreme poverty rate by 84 per cent, from 46 per cent in 1990 to 7 per cent in 2015.

The overwhelming majority of people living on less than \$1.25 a day reside in two regions—Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa—and they account for about 80 per cent of the global total of extremely poor people. Nearly 60 per cent of the world's 1 billion extremely poor people lived in just five countries in 2011 with India, China and Bangladesh among them (ranked first, third and fourth).

Employment opportunities have diminished in both the developing and the developed regions. The largest declines are found in Eastern Asia and Southern Asia, which have experienced drops in the employment-to-population ratio of 6.7 and 4.6 percentage points, respectively. However, the number of workers living in extreme poverty has declined dramatically over the past 25 years, despite the global economic crisis. Progress across regions has been uneven though, and in 2015, 80 per cent of the working poor reside in sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia.

The proportion of workers in vulnerable employment—defined as the share of own-account work and contributing family employment in total employment—has continued to decline in Asia, as well as all regions. The most significant progress has been made in Eastern Asia, where the proportion of people in vulnerable employment has dropped from 71.2 per cent in 1991 to 39.6 per cent in 2015. Globally, however, 45 per cent of all workers are still working in vulnerable conditions. These workers rarely have the benefits associated with decent work. Sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia account for more than half of the world's vulnerable employment, with three out of four workers falling into this category.

The rate of hunger reduction varies widely by subregion. Eastern Asia and South-Eastern Asia have reached the hunger target, due mainly to rapid economic growth in the past two decades. China alone accounts for almost two-thirds of the total reduction in the number of undernourished people in the developing regions since 1990. In contrast, the pace of reduction in Southern Asia has been too slow to achieve the target. Southern Asia faces the greatest hunger burden, with about 281 million undernourished people.

The proportion of children under age five who are underweight has been cut almost in half between 1990 and 2015, according to global projections, and it is possible that the target has been achieved. Yet over 90 million children under age five—one in seven children worldwide—remain underweight, and half of them live in Southern Asia. Eastern Asia has clearly met the target. Projections indicate that South-Eastern Asia likely has met the target too. While Southern Asia has the highest underweight prevalence, with approximately one in three children still affected in 2015, the region has experienced the largest absolute decrease since 1990, a 22 percentage-point drop.



Considerable progress has been made in expanding primary education enrolment since 1990, particularly since the adoption of the MDGs in 2000. A threshold of at least 97 per cent is frequently used to determine whether universal enrolment has been attained. Based on this threshold, enrolment in primary education is now universal or nearly universal in Eastern Asia. South-Eastern Asia has an adjusted net enrolment rate in primary education of 94 per cent in 2015, but these two subregions have made little progress since 2000. Progress has also been significant in Southern Asia, where the adjusted net enrolment rate of children of primary school age increased from 80 per cent to 95 per cent between 2000 and 2015.

The global number of out-of-school children has fallen considerably since 1990, although the pace of improvement has been insufficient to achieve universal primary enrolment by 2015. In Southern Asia, an estimated 57 per cent of out-of-school children will never go to school. In countries affected by conflict, the proportion of out-of-school children increased from 30 per cent in 1999 to 36 per cent in 2012. This worrying trend is particularly strong in Southern Asia (from 21 per cent to 42 per cent).

Since the 1990s, global progress in youth and adult literacy has been slow but steady, and the gap between women and men has narrowed. Southern Asia has shown the greatest improvement in youth literacy, especially among young women. In Southern Asia, the literacy rate increased from 49 per cent to 85 per cent for young women and from 71 per cent to 90 per cent for young men between 1990 and 2015. The youth literacy rate is close to 100 per cent in Eastern Asia and is 98 per cent in South-Eastern Asia.

The education of women and girls has a positive multiplier effect on progress across all development areas. Driven by national and international efforts and the MDG campaign, many more girls are now in school compared with 15 years ago. Today, Eastern Asia, South-Eastern Asia and Southern Asia have achieved parity. The most substantial progress has been made in Southern Asia, where the gender parity index has increased from 0.74—the lowest starting point of all regions in 1990—to 1.03 in 2015.

In tertiary education, enrolment ratios in most regions have improved substantially over the years, but considerable disparities exist in all regions. Enrolment ratios of young women are significantly lower than those of young men in Southern Asia. By contrast, young women in Eastern Asia and South-Eastern Asia have higher enrolment ratios than young men.

Over the last 25 years, women's share of wage employment has continued to grow, though at a slow pace. Despite notable gains by women, significant gaps remain between women and men in the labour market. Women are still less likely to participate in the labour force than men. Globally women earn 24 per cent less than men, with the largest disparities found in Southern Asia (33 per cent). Female participation in the labour force remains especially low in Southern Asia, where women's participation rate is one quarter to one third of men's rate. Barriers to women's employment include household responsibilities and cultural constraints. These factors contribute to limiting women's earnings.

Women in parliament have gained ground in nearly 90 per cent of the 174 countries for which data are available for 1995–2015. The proportion of seats held by women in single or lower houses of national parliament increased from 7 to 18 per cent in Southern Asia; 12 to 18 per cent in South-Eastern Asia; and 20 to 22 per cent in Eastern Asia.

The dramatic decline in preventable child deaths over the past quarter of a century is one of the most significant achievements in human history. Improvements in child survival are evident in all three regions. Eastern Asia is one of only three regions that have met the target of reducing the under-five mortality rate by two thirds ahead of the deadline, with the mortality rate dropping by 78 per cent—from 53 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 11 in 2015, the lowest rate among all developing regions. Over the same period, South-Eastern Asia has achieved a reduction 62 per cent. The mortality rate for children under five in South-Eastern Asia dropped from 71 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 27 in 2015. The mortality rate for children under five in Southern Asia has dropped 60 per cent since 1990. However, Southern Asia continues to have both a high rate of under-five mortality, at 50 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2015, and a large number of total deaths, at 1.8 million.

The annual rate of reduction in under-five mortality has accelerated since 1995 in countries of all income levels except in high-income countries. Although there is a link between a country's level of income and its child mortality, the strong reductions in under-five mortality rates in a number of low-income countries—notably, Bangladesh and Cambodia—prove that low income need not be an impediment to saving children's lives.

Measles deaths have declined rapidly since 2000, from 544,200 deaths to 145,700 deaths in 2013, mostly among children under five years of age. Measles deaths in sub-Saharan Africa (96,000) and Southern Asia (39,800) accounted for 93 per cent of the estimated measles deaths worldwide during 2013.

Many developing regions have made steady progress in improving maternal health, including the regions with the highest maternal mortality ratios. Southern Asia and Eastern Asia have made the greatest progress in reducing maternal mortality.



In Southern Asia the maternal mortality ratio declined by 64 per cent between 1990 and 2013. Despite this progress, every day hundreds of women die during pregnancy or from childbirth-related complications. Maternal deaths are concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia, which together accounted for 86 per cent of such deaths globally in 2013. Most of these deaths are preventable.

A key strategy for reducing maternal morbidity and mortality is ensuring that every birth occurs with the assistance of skilled health personnel, meaning a medical doctor, nurse or midwife. Wide disparities are found among regions in the coverage of skilled attendance at birth. Coverage ranges from universal in Eastern Asia to a low of about 52 per cent in Southern Asia. Southern Asia, along with sub-Saharan Africa, have the highest rates of maternal and newborn mortality in the world.

While profound inequalities in access to and use of reproductive health services persist between urban and rural areas, Eastern Asia has no gap in coverage—100 per cent of births are attended by skilled health personnel in both urban and rural settings.

The World Health Organization recommends a minimum of four antenatal care visits during pregnancy to ensure the well-being of mothers and newborns. Progress has been slow over the past 25 years, with an average increase in coverage of just 17 percentage points since around 1990. In Southern Asia, just 36 per cent of pregnant women received four or more antenatal visits around 2014.

Use of contraception contributes to reducing the number of unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions and maternal deaths. In Southern Asia, the proportion of contraception use increased from 39 per cent to 59 per cent from 1990 to 2015.

Adolescent childbearing can have harmful consequences for the health of both adolescent girls and the children they bear. In all regions, the adolescent birth rate fell between 1990 and 2015, with the most dramatic progress in Eastern Asia and Southern Asia.

Globally, new HIV infections declined by about 40 per cent between 2000 and 2013, falling from an estimated 3.5 million new infections to 2.1 million. New HIV infections fell by 49 per cent in Southern Asia. In contrast, South-Eastern Asia showed either a slow decline or stagnation in the number of new infections. In Eastern Asia, estimates suggest an increase.

The tuberculosis (TB) incidence rate has been falling in all regions, including Asia, since 2000, declining by about 1.5 per cent per year on average. The rate of decline is slow, but based on current trends, all regions, including Asia, are expected to achieve the MDG target of halting the spread and reversing the incidence of TB by 2015. In 2013, 6.1 million people diagnosed with TB were officially reported to public health authorities. China and India accounted for 35 per cent of those notified cases.

In recent years, the net loss of forest area has slowed, due to both a slight decrease in deforestation and an increase in afforestation, as well as the natural expansion of forests in some countries and regions. Asia registered a net gain of around 2.2 million hectares annually between 2000 and 2010 following a net loss in the 1990s. This gain, mostly due to largescale afforestation programmes in China, offsets continued high rates of net loss in many countries in Southern and South-Eastern Asia.

Terrestrial and marine protected areas help to prevent loss of biodiversity, maintain food security and water supplies, strengthen climate resilience and improve human health and well-being. Many regions have substantially increased their terrestrial protected areas since 1990, including in Asia.

Renewable water resources in Southern Asia have withdrawal rates of 48 per cent. This is within the threshold of water stress (25 to 60 per cent withdrawal threshold is defined as physical water stress).

Eastern Asia is the region with the fastest growth in emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂), increasing by more than three times since 1990 from 3.0 in 1990 to 10.3 billion of metric tons in 2012.

Since 1990, the proportion of the population without access to improved drinking water has been cut in half in Eastern Asia, South-Eastern Asia and Southern Asia. Nonetheless, nearly one-fifth of all people using unimproved sources live in South Asia.

Since 1990, the proportion of the population without access to improved drinking water has been cut in half in Eastern Asia, South-Eastern Asia and Southern Asia. Nonetheless, nearly one-fifth of all people using unimproved sources live in Southern Asia. Eastern Asia met the sanitation target ahead of time. In South-Eastern Asia and Southern Asia, the proportion of population using an improved sanitation facility has increase by 25 percentage points since 1990. However, still more than half of population in Southern Asia lack access to improved sanitation.

The proportion of the urban population living in slums has fallen significantly in almost all regions. The largest declines have taken place in Eastern Asia, South-Eastern Asia and Southern Asia (at least a 12 percentage-point drop).

