

The Millennium Development Goals Report



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REGIONAL BACKGROUNDER

Western Asia

Western Asia achieved the target of halving extreme poverty rate ahead of schedule. The proportion of people living on less than \$1.25 a day saw a reduction from 5.3 per cent in 1990 to 1.5 per cent in 2011. However, the extreme poverty rate in Western Asia is expected to increase to 2.6.

As the global economy has entered a new period combining slower growth, widening inequalities and turbulence, employment is not expanding fast enough to keep up with the growing labour force. Employment opportunities have diminished in both the developing and the developed regions. Youth, especially young women, continue to be disproportionately affected by limited employment opportunities and unemployment. In 2015, the situation is most acute in Western Asia, where the proportion of employed young people is only half that of the entire working-age population.

The hunger reduction target remains distant for the region. Western Asia is the only region that has seen a rise in the prevalence of undernourishment from 1990–1992 to 2014–2016. In Western Asia, despite a relatively low number of undernourished people and fast progress in reducing food insecurity in several countries, projections indicate that the prevalence of undernourishment will rise by 32 per cent from 1990–1992 to 2014–2016 due to war, civil unrest and a rapidly growing number of refugees.

The proportion of undernourished people in the total population increased from 6.4 per cent in 1990–1992 to 8.4 per cent in 2014–2016. On the other hand, the region has made significant progress in improving child undernutrition, with the proportion of underweight children under age five declining from 14 per cent to 4 per cent from 1990 to 2015. Projections indicate that Western Asia will likely have met the target by 2015.

The region has made good progress in expanding access to primary education. The adjusted net enrolment rate grew from 84 per cent in 1991 to 95 per cent in 2015. Western Asia has made significant strides in improving gender parity in education. There were only 85, 66 and 63 girls enrolled in primary, secondary and tertiary schools, respectively, for every 100 boys in 1991. Now the numbers have increased to 94, 95 and 99 girls for every 100 boys in 2015. Of note, Western Asia is the only developing region in which gender parity was reached in tertiary education.

Despite progress in the region, the ongoing conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic has had a devastating impact on children's education. Data from the Syrian Ministry of Education indicates that enrolment rates fell by 34 percentage points for grades 1 to 12 in the school year ending in 2013. Among Syrian refugee children of primary and lower secondary school age (6–14 years) in Lebanon, the enrolment rate is estimated to be around 12 per cent.

Access to paid employment remains a distant target for women in Western Asia. Women are far less likely to be employed than their male counterparts. Western Asia has one of the lowest shares of women in non-agricultural wage employment among all developing regions, with women holding only 21 out of every 100 wage-earning jobs in the non-agricultural sector.

In the realm of politics, the Report found that women are gaining more power. The proportion of seats held by women in single or lower houses of national parliament increased from 4.5 per cent in 2000 to 12.4 per cent in 2015. Overall, Western Asia has the second lowest share of women in parliament across regions, after Oceania.

Improvements in child survival are evident in the region and Western Asia is on track to meet the target of a two-thirds reduction in the under-five mortality rate. The under-five mortality rate reduced by 65 per cent between 1990 and 2015, dropping from 65 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 23 in 2015.



In Western Asia, the maternal mortality ratio declined steadily over the last two decades, from 130 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 97 in 2000, and to 74 in 2013. Skilled health personnel attended 86 per cent of deliveries in 2014, compared to only 62 per cent in 1990. Between 1990 and 2015, the number of births to adolescent girls aged 15–19 declined from 63 to 45 births per 1,000 girls. The need for family planning is increasingly being met in Western Asia.

In the area of environmental sustainability, the terrestrial area under protection—areas dedicated to safeguarding and maintaining biological diversity and natural resources, with their associated cultural value—has more than quadrupled, from 3.7 per cent in 1990 to 15.4 per cent in 2014.

The Report found, however, that about 54.5 per cent of renewable freshwater resources are withdrawn in Western Asia. This is close to the threshold of 60 per cent at which physical water scarcity becomes a concern.

However, in the Arabian Peninsula, the withdrawal rates exceed 100 per cent of renewable freshwater resources. Once a country reaches a withdrawal level above 100 per cent, it starts depleting its renewable groundwater resources, relying on non-renewable fossil groundwater or non-conventional sources of water, such as desalinated water, wastewater and agricultural drainage water.

Significant progress was seen in improving access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation, with both targets being met. The proportion of the population using an improved water source increased from 85 per cent to 95 per cent between 1990 and 2015. The proportion of the population using an improved sanitation facility increased from 80 per cent to 94 over the same period.

Globally over the past decade, millions of slum dwellers lives have been improved. The decline of proportion of slum dwellers was observed across most regions. However, Western Asia is the only region which saw an increase in the proportion of slum dwellers, from 21 per cent in 2000 to 25 per cent in 2014.

Aid has also increased from non-DAC countries. Although precise figures are not yet available for all countries for 2014, preliminary data show that the United Arab Emirates reached the highest ratio of ODA to GNI of any country, at 1.17 per cent.