

# The Millennium Development Goals Report



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## Development Goals Are Eluding Western Asia UN Report Finds Rising Poverty Indicators

**CAIRO, 2 July** – Halfway from the deadline of 2015, for implementation Western Asia's progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) has slowed in some areas, according to a new UN report.

The UN assessment, launched here today, found that poverty rates in the region more than doubled between 1990 and 2005. The situation, the report said, has made Western Asia the only region in the developing world where the poverty gap ratio has increased.

The ratio, which measures the average extent to which the income of impoverished people falls short of the poverty line, is an indication that people living on less than a dollar a day have become even poorer.

The study, *the Millennium Development Goals Report 2007*, determined that since 1999, there has been almost no progress in moving towards universal primary education in Western Asia. Even more worrisome, the report said, is the possibility that Western Asia's situation might be even worse than the statistics indicate, since official data are often unavailable for countries in conflict or post-conflict situations. The picture would be even less encouraging if those data were included in the other statistics.

However, the report found that Western Asia had made some gains in promoting child nutrition, an accomplishment reflected in a decline in the proportion of underweight children under five, which fell to 7 per cent in 2005 from 11 per cent in 1990.

In education, a significant gender gap persists in Western Asia despite the fact that the developing world as a whole has made some progress in reducing the disparity between girls and boys in enrolment in primary school.

The UN report – based on comprehensive data gathered by an international team of development experts – said that in Western Asia, women continue to be largely excluded from paid jobs outside the agricultural sector. Women have secured only 21 per cent of paid labour in non-agricultural jobs, the report said.

A gender gap was also evident in political decision-making. According to the report, only 8 per cent of the seats in national parliaments in countries of the region are held by women.

There were, however, some signs that efforts to promote gender equality in the region were making progress. In December 2006, both women and men stood for election and voted in the United Arab Emirates, where women obtained 23 per cent of the seats. The involvement of women in electoral politics was a first for that country.

National history was also made in Kuwait, where women also stood for election for the first time; and in Bahrain, where the first woman was elected to the country's lower house of parliament.

However, the report found that Western Asia had made only limited progress in addressing maternal mortality, especially in offering life-saving reproductive health services such as the provision of skilled health personnel for women facing complications in pregnancy and childbirth.

Western Asia's progress in addressing these issues since 1990 has been slow at best, the report found, noting that the proportion of deliveries attended by trained health-care personnel grew only 6 percentage points, to 66 per cent, between 1990 and 2005.

Average child mortality levels for the region have also declined at a very slow pace, although in 1990, Western Asia's rates were lower than in most of the other developing regions. The slow trend is entirely a reflection of a dramatic surge in child mortality in Iraq, the report said.

The Millennium Development Goals Report, an annual assessment of progress towards the MDGs mandated by the General Assembly, is based on data compiled by over 20 organizations both within and outside the UN System. The project is overseen by the UN Secretariat's Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

**For more information and media contacts, please see [www.un.org/millenniumgoals](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals)**