

# The Millennium Development Goals Report



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## Western Asia still struggling to reduce extreme poverty

*Region is off-track five years from the target date for the Millennium Development Goals*

(Cairo / Beirut / Manama, 23 June) Western Asia continues to face enormous challenges in reducing poverty, improving health and empowering women, according to a UN progress report on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) released today.

The proportion of people living in extreme poverty – on less than \$1.25 a day – increased steadily between 1990 and 2005, from 2 to 6 per cent, making Western Asia one of only three regions worldwide that are not on track to meet the UN target of halving extreme poverty by 2015.

The *Millennium Development Goals Report 2010* also notes that the food and economic crises are believed to have increased the prevalence of hunger in the region, no progress was made in reducing the proportion of underweight children, and more employed people were pushed into less secure jobs – as own-account or unpaid family workers.

For Western Asia, the report finds, in particular, that:

- The proportion of undernourished people was on the rise between 1990-92 and 2000-02 (from 5 to 8 per cent) and had only begun to decline slowly in 2005-07 (to 7 per cent), before the food and economic crises, which may have slowed or reversed progress again.
- The proportion of children who are underweight remained unchanged at 14 per cent between 1990 and 2008.
- Progress has been slow in primary school enrolment, and although the gender gap has been slowly narrowing in primary education, it remains large in secondary education.

Achieving gender equality at the work place also remains a challenge in the region, according to the report. The share of women earning incomes outside the agricultural sector has risen very slowly over the almost 20-year period between 1990 and 2008 to 20 per cent, and is projected to further progress to 22 per cent by 2015 – well below parity. And only 10 per cent of senior or managerial positions are held by women in Western Asia – the second-lowest percentage among all regions. Women also represent a mere 9 per cent of those sitting in parliaments. Although the region made some progress in expanding access to safe drinking water and sanitation, Western Asia still is not on track to meet the targets by 2015. There also remains a large gap between urban and rural areas, with only 78 per cent of the population in rural areas using safe drinking water, versus 96 per cent in cities. And while 94 per cent of the urban population use safe sanitation, only 67 per cent of rural dwellers do.

The Western Asia region is comprised of the following countries: Bahrain, Cyprus, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

At a September UN summit, world leaders will seek agreement on an action agenda to build on successes and close the gaps in achieving all the MDGs by the target year of 2015. More than 100 Heads of State and Government are expected, along with leaders from the private sector, foundations and civil society organizations.

The *Millennium Development Goals Report*, an annual assessment of regional progress towards the Goals, reflects the most comprehensive, up-to-date data compiled by over 25 UN and international agencies. Produced by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the report has been designated by the UN General Assembly as an official input to the MDG summit. A complete set of the data used to prepare the report is available at <http://mdgs.un.org>

For more information, press materials and inter-agency media contact list, see [www.un.org/millenniumgoals](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals)

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