

The Millennium Development Goals Report 2014



UNITED NATIONS

Addendum

Goal 4

Reduce child mortality

Quick facts

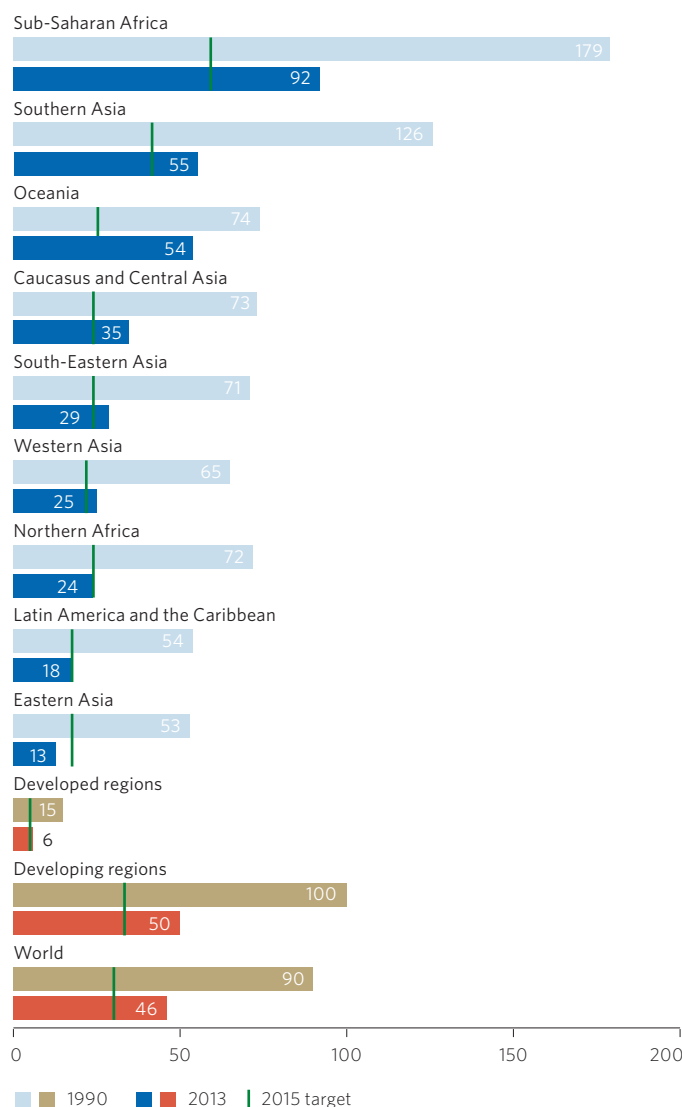
- ▶ The child mortality rate has halved since 1990; more than six million fewer children died in 2013 than in 1990.
- ▶ During the period from 2005 to 2013, the annual rate of reduction in under-five mortality was more than three times faster than between 1990 and 1995.
- ▶ Globally, four out of every five deaths of children under age five continue to occur in sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia.

TARGET

Reduce by two thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate

Despite substantial progress, the world is still falling short of the MDG child mortality target

Under-five mortality rate, 1990 and 2013 (Deaths per 1,000 live births)



The latest estimates of under-five mortality¹ show that under-five mortality declined by 49 per cent globally, from 90 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 46 in 2013. As a result, the total number of under-five deaths in the world has fallen from 12.7 million in 1990 to 6.3 million in 2013. About 17,000 fewer children died every day in 2013 than in 1990. However, it still implies the deaths of nearly 17,000 children under age five every day in 2013.

All regions except sub-Saharan Africa and Oceania have more than halved the under-five mortality rate. Eastern Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Northern Africa, have already reduced the under-five mortality rate by more than two-thirds since 1990 and thus achieved MDG 4. Western Asia, with a reduction of 61 per cent, and South-eastern Asia, 59 per cent, are also close to reaching the MDG 4 target.

Currently, the world is reducing under-five mortality faster than at any other time during the past two decades. The global annual rate of reduction in under-five mortality has accelerated steadily from 1.2 per cent between 1990 and 1995 to 4.0 per cent between 2005 and 2013. However, the current rate of reduction remains insufficient for those regions that still fall short to reach the two-thirds reduction target by 2015.

It is critical to reduce the number of child deaths in sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia

Though sub-Saharan Africa has seen the decline in the under-five mortality rate accelerate, with the average annual rate of reduction increasing from 0.8 per cent in 1990–1995 to 4.2 per cent in 2005–2013, the region still has the highest child mortality rates—92 deaths per 1,000 live births, more than 15 times the average for developed regions. Faster progress in reducing child mortality in the rest of the world has led to a higher concentration of under-five deaths in sub-Saharan Africa. By 2050 close to 40 per cent of all births will take place in sub-Saharan Africa, and 37 per cent of children under age five will live there, so the number of under-five deaths could stagnate or even increase without more progress in the region.

¹ The latest estimates on child mortality were released on September 16, 2014 by the United Nations Interagency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (IGME) and are presented in Levels and Trends in Child Mortality—Report 2014, available at http://www.childmortality.org/files_v17/download/UNICEF%202014%20IGME%20child%20mortality%20Report_Final.pdf. The underlying data are available at www.childmortality.org.

Southern Asia has made strong progress in reducing the number of child deaths. But the region continues to have a high under-five mortality rate (55 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2013), and nearly one in three under-five deaths still takes place there. Two-thirds of the under-five deaths in Southern Asia occur in India, which has the highest number of under-five deaths in the world (1.3 million in 2013).

Efforts must concentrate on survival of newborns

The first 28 days of life—the neonatal period—are the most vulnerable time for a child’s survival. Neonatal mortality is becoming increasingly important not only because the proportion of under-five deaths that occur during the neonatal period is increasing as under-five mortality declines, but also because the health interventions needed to address the major causes of neonatal deaths generally differ from those needed to address other under-five deaths and are intimately linked to those that are necessary to protect maternal health.

Globally, the neonatal mortality rate fell from 33 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 20 in 2013, and the number of neonatal deaths declined from 4.7 million in 1990 to 2.8 million in 2013. However, the decline over 1990–2013 has been slower than that of post-neonatal mortality: 40 per cent, compared with 56 per cent, a pattern consistent across all MDG regions.

In five developing regions—Eastern Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Northern Africa, Southern Asia and Western Asia—more than half of under-five deaths took place during the neonatal period in 2013. Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest neonatal mortality rate (31 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2013) and accounts for 39 per cent of global neonatal deaths. Together with Oceania, the region has recorded the least improvement over the last two decades, with the neonatal mortality rate declining only 32 per cent. The greatest progress was in Eastern Asia (69 per cent decline in the neonatal mortality rate), followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (58 per cent) and Northern Africa (56 per cent).

The first day and week are most critical for the survival of newborns. In 2013 almost 1 million newborns (36 per cent) died on the day they were born, and another 1 million (37 per cent) died within the next six days of birth. Some 0.8 million neonatal deaths (27 per cent) occurred between day 7 and day 27 of life. Sustaining the momentum on newborn survival requires a renewed effort to build strong health services to provide high-quality prenatal care, skilled birth attendants, postnatal care for babies and mothers as well as other cost-effective interventions.

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