

The Millennium Development Goals Report

2011



UNITED NATIONS

Addendum

Goal 4

Reduce child mortality

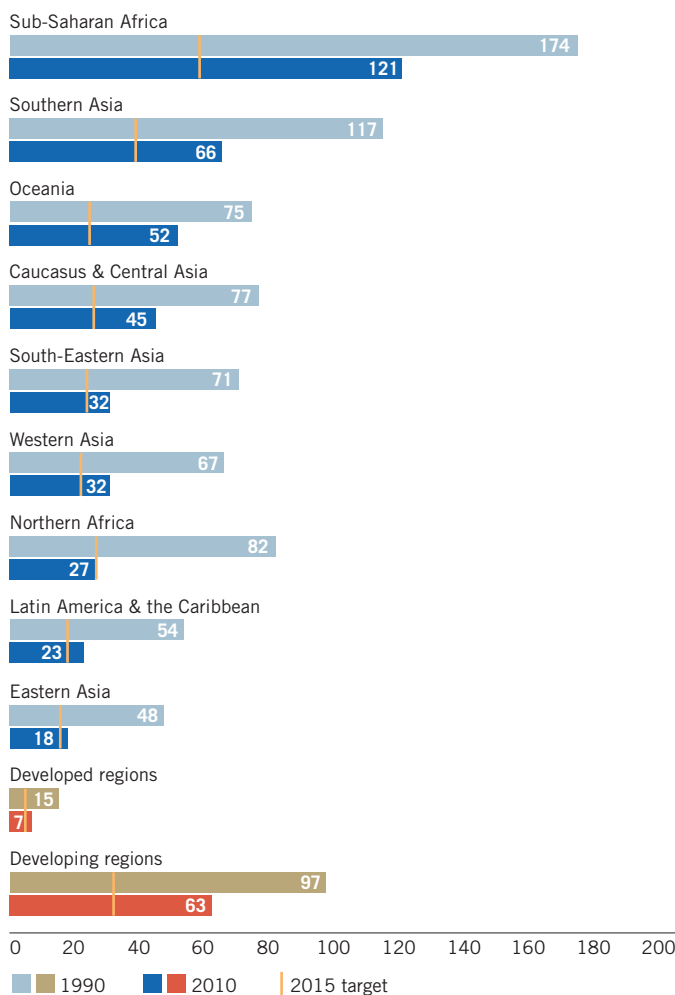


TARGET

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

The rate of decline in child mortality has accelerated but remains insufficient to reach MDG 4

Under-five mortality rate, 1990 and 2010 (Deaths per 1,000 live births)



The latest estimates of child mortality¹ show that steady progress is being made in reducing child deaths. Globally, the mortality rate for children under five has declined by 35 per cent, from 88 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 57 in 2010. All regions, except Sub-Saharan Africa, Caucasus and Central Asia, Southern Asia and Oceania, have seen reductions of at least 50 per cent. Despite population growth, the number of deaths in children under five worldwide declined from 12 million in 1990 to 7.6 million in 2010, which translates into nearly 12,000 fewer children dying each day. The rate of decline in under-five mortality has accelerated—from 1.9 per cent a year over 1990–2000 to 2.5 per cent a year over 2000–2010.

The greatest success is found in Northern Africa and Eastern Asia, where under-five mortality declined by 67 per cent and 63 per cent, respectively. Of the 66 countries with high under-five mortality (above 40 deaths per 1,000 live births), 14 countries reduced their rates by at least half between 1990 and 2010. Among them, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Madagascar, Nepal and Timor-Leste recorded a 60 per cent drop or more.

The highest levels of under-five mortality continue to be found in Sub-Saharan Africa, where one in eight children die before the age of five (121 deaths per 1,000 live births), nearly twice the average in developing regions overall and more than 17 times the average in developed regions. Southern Asia has the second highest rate—66 deaths per 1,000 live births or about one child in 15. With rapid progress in other regions, the disparities between these two regions and the rest of the world have widened.

Of the 26 countries with under-five mortality rates above 100 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2010, 24 are in Sub-Saharan Africa. At the same time, major inroads are being made. Six of the fourteen countries with more than a 50 per cent reduction in child deaths between 1990 and 2010 are in Sub-Saharan Africa, as are four of the five countries with the largest absolute reductions (more than 100 deaths per 1,000 live births). Moreover, Sub-Saharan Africa has doubled its average rate of reduction from 1.2 per cent a year over 1990–2000 to 2.4 per cent a year over 2000–2010.

About 70 per cent of the world's under-five deaths in 2010 occurred in only 15 countries, and about half in only five countries: India, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Pakistan and China. India (22 per cent) and Nigeria (11 per cent) together account for a third of under five deaths worldwide.

Increasing evidence suggests that the MDG target can be reached, but only with substantial and accelerated action to eliminate the leading killers of children. Globally, the four major killers of children under age 5 are pneumonia (18 per cent), diarrhoeal diseases (15 per cent), preterm birth complications (12 per cent) and birth asphyxia (9 per cent). Undernutrition is an underlying cause in more than a third of under-five deaths. Malaria is still a major killer in Sub-Saharan Africa, causing about 16 per cent of under-five deaths. The proportion of under-five deaths that occur within the first month of life (the neonatal period) has increased about 10 per cent since 1990 to more than 40 per cent, pointing to the need for better maternal and neonatal care. Special efforts to fight pneumonia, diarrhoea, malaria and undernutrition, with effective preventative and curative interventions reaching most vulnerable children, could save the lives of millions of children.

¹ The latest estimates on child mortality were released on September 15, 2011 by the United Nations Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (IGME) and are presented in *Levels and Trends in Child Mortality – Report 2011*, available at http://www.childinfo.org/files/Child_Mortality_Report_2011.pdf. The underlying data are available at www.childmortality.org.

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