



**EMBARGOED**

**Until 11 September 2008**

**12:01 a.m. local time**

**PRESS RELEASE**

**MDG Report 2008**

## **Western Asia has not made enough progress in reducing extreme poverty**

*UN report finds some progress on health*

CAIRO, 11 September 2008 — There has been very little progress in eradicating extreme poverty in Western Asia through to the year 2005, says the new report on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) just released by the United Nations. New estimates of extreme poverty, recently released by the World Bank, indicate that the proportion of people living below the new poverty line of \$1.25 a day increased in the region during the 1990s and then only marginally decreased between 1999 and 2005.

The achievement of full and productive employment and decent work for all has been recognized as an indispensable condition for poverty eradication and is now a new target among those to be met to fulfil all Millennium Development Goals. But full employment in the region remains a distant possibility, especially for women — only 22 per cent of women of working age are employed. And the proportion of working poor — those employed but still living below the extreme poverty line — is estimated to have increased between 1997 and 2007.

The report also indicates that progress towards universal primary enrolment has been slower than in most other regions, with 28 per cent of children of primary school age still not in school.

Achieving gender equality by 2015 will require much accelerated progress in the region. Gender parity in education remains low, especially at the secondary level. Women remain trapped in insecure, low-paid positions, with only 20 per cent of wage employees outside agriculture being women. In spite of some increase in women's representation in parliaments, there are still countries in the region where women have no representation at all. On average, female representation remains among the lowest across all regions.

The UN report also points to the little progress that has been made in saving mothers' lives. At the global level, maternal mortality has decreased by less than 1 per cent per year between 1990 and 2005. In Western Asia, although levels of mortality are lower than in other developing regions, the number of maternal deaths decreased from 190 to only 160 per 100,000 live births. And about one fourth of deliveries still took place without the assistance of skilled health personnel.

Adolescent pregnancy contributes to the cycle of maternal and childhood mortality, the report says, and jeopardizes opportunities for education and socio-economic advancement. As in many other regions, after a decrease in the 1990s, adolescent fertility rates have stagnated between 2000 and 2005, at 50 births per thousand, for women 15-19 years old.

But there is also positive news. Western Asia has made some gains in the health area, with reductions in child mortality and wider access to safe drinking water and sanitation, although progress will need to accelerate for the related targets to be met by 2015.

*(over)*

The report also points to a rapid increase in access to the Internet, with the number of Internet users rising from only 4 per 100 people in 2000 to 13 in 2006.

The UN report, the most comprehensive and updated global MDG assessment, is based on a comprehensive data set gathered by over 25 organizations both within and outside the United Nations System, including the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). 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).

