

Regional Backgrounder

Western Asia

Western Asia achieved the target of halving extreme poverty rate ahead of schedule. The proportion of people living on less than \$1.25 a day saw a reduction from 5.3 per cent in 1990 to 1.5 per cent in 2011. However, the extreme poverty rate in Western Asia is expected to increase to 2.6.

As the global economy has entered a new period combining slower growth, widening inequalities and turbulence, employment is not expanding fast enough to keep up with the growing labour force. Employment opportunities have diminished in both the developing and the developed regions. Youth, especially young women, continue to be disproportionately affected by limited employment opportunities and unemployment. In 2015, the situation is most acute in Western Asia, where the proportion of employed young people is only half that of the entire working-age population.

The hunger reduction target remains distant for the region. Western Asia is the only region that has seen a rise in the prevalence of undernourishment from 1990–1992 to 2014–2016. In Western Asia, despite a relatively low number of undernourished people and fast progress in reducing food insecurity in several countries, projections indicate that the prevalence of undernourishment will rise by 32 per cent from 1990–1992 to 2014–2016 due to war, civil unrest and a rapidly growing number of refugees.

The proportion of undernourished people in the total population increased from 6.4 per cent in 1990–1992 to 8.4 per cent in 2014–2016. On the other hand, the region has made significant progress in improving child undernutrition, with the proportion of underweight children under age five declining from 14 per cent to 4 per cent from 1990 to 2015. Projections indicate that Western Asia will likely have met the target by 2015.

The region has made good progress in expanding access to primary education. The adjusted net enrollment rate in primary education increased from 67.6 per cent in 1990 to 91.3 per cent in 2015. Projections indicate that Western Asia will likely have met the target by 2015.



