

# PROGRESS TOWARD THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

by Farzaneh Roudi-Fahimi

The Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) has made significant strides over the past few decades in improving the health, education, and standard of living of its people. But countries in the region face a number of challenges to development, including wide social and economic gaps between rich and poor, rapid population growth, high youth unemployment, and persistent gender discrimination.

MENA governments were among the 189 countries that attended the 2000 United Nations Millennium Summit, where leaders from around the world adopted the Millennium Declaration and made a commitment to combat poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation, and discrimination against women. They also committed to creating a new global partnership for development that would include actions by developed countries to reduce debt and increase aid, trade, and technology transfer to developing countries.

The Millennium Declaration provides concrete goals and quantifiable targets designed to help countries track their progress. Each country is encouraged to set its strategies and develop its national plans to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) according to its own economic and social circumstances.

This publication provides information for 19 MENA countries and territories. The indicators presented here are among the Millennium Development Indicators chosen by the international community to monitor progress toward meeting the MDGs (see Box 1, page 2).

The Millennium Development Indicators are valuable tools to highlight the status of human development in individual countries and to support efforts to monitor improvements in people's lives. But the indicators do not illustrate the full story. For example, statistics on school enrollment do not take into account the quality of the education provided, and statistics on contraceptive use do not reflect the quality of reproductive health care.

Table 1

## Percent of Population Living Below Poverty Lines in Selected Countries

	Based on international definition of poverty lines		Based on individual countries' definition of poverty lines		
	At \$1 a day	At \$2 a day	Total	Urban	Rural
Algeria	<2	15	23	15	30
Egypt	3	53	23	22	23
Jordan	<2	7	12	10	18
Morocco	<2	8	19	12	27
Tunisia	<2	12	8	4	14
Yemen	16	--	25	22	27

**SOURCES:** World Bank, *Reducing Vulnerability and Increasing Opportunity, Social Protection in the Middle East and North Africa* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2002): tables A4.1 and A4.2; and United Nations, Millennium Development Database ([http://millenniumindicators.un.org/unsd/mi\\_mi\\_goals.asp](http://millenniumindicators.un.org/unsd/mi_mi_goals.asp), accessed Feb. 12, 2004).

Furthermore, the MDGs use the international definition of "extreme poverty"—individuals living on less than US\$1 per day. But that definition may not conform to countries' own definitions of poverty—the amount of money needed to sustain an acceptable standard of living set by their authorities. In Egypt, for example, an estimated 3 percent of the population lived on less than US\$1 a day in the mid-1990s, and an estimated 53 percent lived on less than US\$2 a day. But according to the official Egyptian definition of poverty, around 23 percent of the population lived below the poverty line (see Table 1). MENA countries need to not only create policies and programs to reduce the number of people who currently are poor, they must also attempt to reduce the likelihood of other vulnerable people becoming poor.

One also should keep in mind that the Millennium Development Indicators are crude in that they usually monitor progress at national levels.

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Table 2

## Selected Millennium Development Indicators

	Percent of children under 5 years old who are underweight	Percent of total population who are malnourished	Percent enrolled in primary school <sup>a</sup>	Percent of pupils starting grade 1 who reach grade 5	Percent of 15 to 24 year olds who are literate	Number of females enrolled in school per 100 enrolled males			Number of literate females per 100 literate males (ages 15 to 24)	Percent of nonagricultural workers who are female
						Primary	Secondary	Tertiary		
Algeria	6	6	98	97	91	88	103	—	92	12
Bahrain	—	—	96	100	99	96	101	150	101	13
Egypt	9	4	93	99	72	89	90	—	85	20
Iran	11	5	—	98	95	91	89	89	96	—
Iraq	16	27	93	—	46	80	59	52	51	—
Jordan	4	6	94	98	99	95	98	106	100	15
Kuwait	10	4	—	—	93	96	98	209	102	23
Lebanon	3	3	—	97	96	93	107	108	96	—
Libya	5	—	96	—	97	97	100	93	95	—
Morocco	9	7	78	80	71	84	78	78	80	27
Oman	24	—	65	96	99	93	96	138	98	25
Palestine <sup>e</sup>	4	—	97	—	98	96	102	90	—	16
Qatar	6	—	95	—	96	95	100	274	105	15
Saudi Arabia	14	3	98	94	94	96	86	127	97	14
Syria	9	3	96	96	89	89	87	—	85	17
Tunisia	4	—	99	93	95	91	101	93	93	—
Turkey	8	—	89	98	97	89	67	66	96	19
UAE	14	3	87	98	92	92	98	—	108	14
Yemen	46	33	67	—	69	60	35	26	63	7

## NOTES:

a Net enrollment ratio is the percentage of children of the appropriate age for primary school who are enrolled.

b The number of deaths of children under age 5 per 1,000 live births.

c The number of deaths of infants under age 1 per 1,000 live births.

d The number of women dying due to pregnancy-related causes per 100,000 live births.

e Palestine includes the Arab population of the West Bank and Gaza.

## Box 1

## The Millennium Development Goals, Targets, and Indicators

The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) cover a range of development issues, including reducing child and maternal mortality, fighting various infectious diseases, promoting gender equity and women's empowerment, and eradicating poverty.

There are a total of 18 Millennium Development Targets to help monitor progress. Each target is accompanied by a set of measurable indicators to allow countries to identify areas in which they could improve. Most goals are designed to be achieved by 2015, and data from 1990 are used as a benchmark.

The indicators listed here are those for which data are shown in tables 1 and 2. Goal 8, not listed here, is to "develop a global partnership for development."

For a complete list of the MDGs and their associated targets and indicators, see the Millennium Development Goals website: [www.developmentgoals.org](http://www.developmentgoals.org).

## Goal 1: Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger

*Target 1:* Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day

- *Proportion of population below \$1 per day*

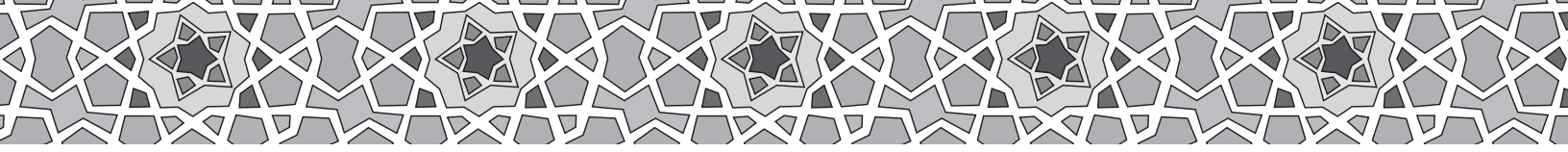
*Target 2:* Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger

- *Prevalence of underweight in children under 5 years of age*
- *Proportion of population below minimum level of dietary energy consumption*

## Goal 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education

*Target 3:* Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling

- *Net enrollment ratio in primary education*
- *Proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach grade 5*
- *Literacy rate of 15-to-24-year-olds*



Percent of national parliamentary seats held by women	Under-5 mortality rate <sup>b</sup>	Infant mortality rate <sup>c</sup>	Percent of 1-year-olds immunized against measles	Maternal mortality ratio <sup>d</sup>	Percent of births attended by skilled health personnel	Percent of married women 15 to 49 using contraception		Percent of people with access to improved water source		
						Any	Modern	Rural	Urban	
6	49	39	81	140	92	64	50	82	94	Algeria
0	16	13	99	46	98	62	31	—	—	Bahrain
2	46	38	96	84	69	60	57	96	99	Egypt
4	42	35	99	37	90	74	56	83	98	Iran
—	125	102	90	290	72	—	—	48	96	Iraq
5	27	22	95	41	99	56	41	84	100	Jordan
0	10	9	99	5	98	52	39	—	—	Kuwait
2	32	28	96	100	89	63	40	100	100	Lebanon
—	19	16	91	75	94	45	26	68	72	Libya
11	43	39	96	230	40	58	49	56	98	Morocco
—	13	11	99	14	95	24	18	30	41	Oman
—	25	21	94	74	97	51	37	86	97	Palestine <sup>e</sup>
—	16	11	99	10	98	43	32	—	—	Qatar
—	22	19	97	23	91	32	29	64	100	Saudi Arabia
10	22	18	90	65	89	47	35	64	94	Syria
12	26	21	94	70	91	63	53	58	92	Tunisia
4	42	36	82	130	81	64	38	86	81	Turkey
0	9	8	94	3	96	28	24	—	—	UAE
1	107	79	65	350	22	23	13	68	74	Yemen

**SOURCES:** United Nations, Millennium Development Database ([http://millenniumindicators.un.org/unsd/mi/mi\\_goals.asp](http://millenniumindicators.un.org/unsd/mi/mi_goals.asp), accessed Feb. 12, 2004); United Nations, *Millennium Development Goals for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia 2002* (<http://www.undp.org/mdg/saudi.pdf>, accessed Feb. 11, 2004); United Nations, *The Millennium Development Goals Progress Report 2002, Occupied Palestinian Territories* (<http://intranet.papp.undp.org/public/files/content/mdgr%20final%20version.pdf>, accessed Feb. 11, 2004); ORC Macro, *Jordan DHS 2002* and *Egypt Interim DHS 2003*; League of Arab States, *Pan-Arab Project for Family Health* (Syria and Yemen, 2003); and Farzaneh Roudi-Fahimi, *Women's Reproductive Health in the Middle East and North Africa*.

### Goal 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women

**Target 4:** Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and in all levels of education no later than 2015

- Ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary, and tertiary education
- Ratio of literate females to males among 15-to-24-year-olds
- Share of women in wage employment in the nonagricultural sector
- Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament

### Goal 4: Reduce Child Mortality

**Target 5:** Reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate

- Under-5 mortality rate
- Infant mortality rate
- Proportion of 1-year-old children immunized against measles

### Goal 5: Improve Maternal Health

**Target 6:** Reduce by three-quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio

- Maternal mortality ratio
- Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel

### Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases

**Target 7:** Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS

- Contraceptive prevalence rate

### Goal 7: Ensure Environmental Sustainability

**Target 10:** Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water

- Proportion of population with sustainable access to an improved water source

## PRB's Middle East and North Africa Program

The goal of the Population Reference Bureau's Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Program is to respond to regional needs for timely and objective information and analysis on population, socioeconomic, and reproductive health issues. The program raises awareness of these issues among decisionmakers in the region and in the international community, in hopes of influencing policies and improving the lives of people living in the MENA region.

MENA program activities include producing and disseminating both print and electronic publications on important population, reproductive health, environment, and development topics (many publications are translated into Arabic); working with journalists in the MENA region to enhance their knowledge and coverage of population and development issues; and working with researchers in the MENA region to improve their skills in communicating their research findings to policymakers and the media.

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### MENA Policy Briefs:

*Progress Toward the Millennium Development Goals in the Middle East and North Africa* (March 2004)

*Making Motherhood Safer in Egypt* (March 2004)

*Empowering Women, Developing Society: Female Education in the Middle East and North Africa* (October 2003)

*Women's Reproductive Health in the Middle East and North Africa* (February 2003)

*Finding the Balance: Water Scarcity and Population Demand in the Middle East and North Africa* (July 2002)

*Iran's Family Planning Program: Responding to a Nation's Needs* (June 2002)

*Population Trends and Challenges in the Middle East and North Africa* (October 2001)

These policy briefs are available in both English and Arabic, and can be ordered free of charge to audiences in the MENA region by contacting the Population Reference Bureau via e-mail ([prborders@prb.org](mailto:prborders@prb.org)) or at the address below. The English versions are available on PRB's website ([www.prb.org](http://www.prb.org)).

National data mask the gaps that may exist in a country. Progress measured at the country level may not necessarily be felt by all its citizens. "Women, rural inhabitants, ethnic minorities, and other poor people are typically progressing slower than national averages—or showing no progress—even where countries as a whole are moving towards the Goals," according to *Human Development Report 2003*.

Overall, MENA countries face a more basic and challenging issue: the availability, reliability, and timely reporting of relevant data.

Governments attending the Millennium Summit agreed to collect data on the Millennium Indicators and report to the United Nations General Assembly. Table 2 shows selected Millennium Development Indicators for which data are generally available. Still, some countries lack data for a number of key indicators.

The lack of current information is sometimes due to the inability or unwillingness of government agencies to provide new data. Moreover, when governments do collect new information, analysis and reporting may be limited. It is particularly important to have established mechanisms to inform policymakers in a timely manner and have the results incorporated into development plans and programs. Making reliable data and analysis available to the public is fundamental in helping MENA countries move toward more open and democratic societies.

In addition to basic statistics, there is a great need to collect data and report accurately about culturally sensitive topics, such as the underlying social factors contributing to the spread of HIV/AIDS. Target 7 of the MDGs is to halt and reverse the epidemic by 2015. The number of people living with HIV/AIDS is relatively low in MENA as compared with other world's regions but is growing in every MENA country.

In conclusion, countries are encouraged to use the MDGs not just as a list of worthy targets but rather as the basis for policies to achieve socially equitable, sustainable development. Achievement of the MDGs requires multisectoral programs that tackle all goals simultaneously. Moreover, human rights, good governance and democracy, and political stability must play an important part in achieving the goals.

### Acknowledgments

Farzaneh (Nazy) Roudi-Fahimi of the Population Reference Bureau (PRB) prepared this policy brief with assistance from PRB staff. Thanks are due to Maha E-Adawy of the Ford Foundation, and Lori Ashford and Nancy Yinger of PRB who reviewed drafts and provided useful comments.

This work has been funded by the Ford Foundation Office for Middle East and North Africa in Cairo.

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