



Our Commitments to Children

A Millennium agenda for children

Millions of children make their way through life impoverished, abandoned, uneducated, malnourished, discriminated against, neglected and vulnerable. For them, life is a daily struggle to survive. Whether they live in urban centres or rural outposts, they risk missing out on their childhood¹ – excluded from essential services such as hospitals and schools, lacking the protection of family and community, often at risk of exploitation and abuse. For these children, childhood as a time to grow, learn, play and feel safe is, in effect, meaningless.

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that we, the adults of the world, are failing in our responsibility to ensure that every child enjoys a childhood. Since 1924, when the League of Nations adopted the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child, the international community has made a series of firm commitments to children to ensure that their rights – to survival, health, education, protection and participation, among others – are met.

The most far-reaching and comprehensive of these commitments is the Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989 and ratified by 192 countries. As the most widely endorsed human rights treaty in history, the Convention, together with its Optional Protocols, lays out in specific terms the legal duties of governments to children. Children's survival, development and protection are now no longer matters of charitable concern but of moral and legal obligation. Governments are held to account for their care of children by an international body, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, to which they have agreed to report regularly.

In recent years, world leaders have not only reaffirmed and expanded these commitments

SUMMARY

ISSUE: Meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the broader aims of the Millennium Declaration would transform the lives of millions of children, who would be spared illness and premature death, escape extreme poverty and malnutrition, gain access to safe water and decent sanitation facilities and complete primary schooling. Though some regions and countries have fallen behind on the goals, they can still be met.

The Member States of the United Nations are committed to meeting the MDGs and have coalesced around a set of key initiatives to accelerate progress (*see below*). Putting these initiatives into practice will demand renewed commitment to the Millennium agenda and additional resources. It will also require a much stronger focus on reaching those children currently excluded from essential services and denied protection and participation. Unless many more of these children are reached, several of the MDGs – particularly the goal on universal primary education – will simply not be met on time or in full.

The children who are hardest to reach include those living in the poorest countries and most deprived communities within countries and those facing discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, disability or belonging to an indigenous group; children caught up in armed conflict or affected by HIV/AIDS; and children who lack a formal identity, who suffer child protection abuses or who are not treated as children. These children, the factors that exclude them and make them invisible, and the actions that those responsible for their well-being must take to safeguard and include them are the focus of *The State of the World's Children 2006*.

ACTION: To meet the Millennium Development Goals for children, including the excluded and the invisible, the following is required:

- A massive push is needed to boost access to essential services for those children and their families currently missing out. This includes immediate interventions – dubbed 'quick impact initiatives' – that can provide a vital kick-start to human development and poverty reduction.
- Longer-term initiatives that are rooted in a human rights-based approach to development – many of which are already under way – must be stepped up or launched at the same time as the immediate interventions, helping to ensure that the latter are as effective as possible. Building up national capacities, through strategies led by national governments and local communities, is the best way to ensure the sustainability of these initiatives over the longer term.
- Deeper approaches must be taken that give special attention to the most vulnerable. This requires the participation of governments – through legislation, budgets, research and programmes – along with donors, international agencies, civil society and the media to reach children who are most at risk of missing out on the Millennium agenda.

but have also set specific time-bound goals as a framework for meeting them. The latest such commitments were made at the Millennium Summit in September 2000, from which the Millennium Declaration and, subsequently, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) emerged, and at the UN General Assembly's Special Session on Children in May 2002, which

resulted in the outcome document 'A World Fit for Children'. These two compacts complement each other and, taken together, form a strategy – a Millennium agenda – for protecting childhood in the opening years of the 21st century.

This year, *The State of the World's Children* will focus on the millions of children for

The Millennium Development Goals are the central development objectives of the Millennium agenda

GOALS	TARGETS, 2015
1. Eradicate extreme hunger and poverty	Reduce by half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day Reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education	Ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling
3. Promote gender equality and empower women	Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015
4. Reduce child mortality	Reduce by two thirds the mortality rate among children under five
5. Improve maternal health	Reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases	Halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS. Halt and begin to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases
7. Ensure environmental stability	Reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water Achieve a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020 Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes; reverse loss of environmental resources
8. Develop a global partnership for development	Develop further an open trading and financial system that is rule-based, predictable and non-discriminatory and that includes a commitment to good governance, development and poverty reduction – nationally and internationally Address the least developed countries' special needs, and the special needs of landlocked and Small Island Developing States Deal comprehensively with developing countries' debt problems through national and international measures to make debt sustainable in the long term In cooperation with the developing countries, develop decent and productive work for youth In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies – especially information and communications technologies

Sources: Adapted from United Nations, Millennium Declaration, 2000 and other UN sources.



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whom these pledges of a better world remain unfulfilled. The report assesses global efforts to realize the MDGs, the central development targets of the agenda, and demonstrates the marked impact that their achievement would have on children's lives and future generations. It also explains how, with the MDGs focused on national averages, children in marginalized communities risk missing out on essential services such as health care, education and protection. It argues that children denied their right to a formal identity, suffering child protection abuses or facing early marriage, armed combat and hazardous labour are among those most at risk of exclusion from the Millennium agenda.

Reaching the MDGs should benefit not only the better off, but also those children who are most in need, whose rights are most abused and undervalued and who are currently excluded from services, marginalized and unprotected by society and the state. This is a report about those children and ways to include them in the Millennium agenda.

The Millennium agenda and children

Seeking to promote human progress through achievable goals

The Millennium Declaration is both visionary and pragmatic. Its vision is a world of peace, equity, tolerance, security, freedom, solidarity, respect for the environment and shared responsibility in which special care and attention is given to the vulnerable, especially children.² Its pragmatism lies in its central premise: Human development and poverty reduction are prerequisites for such a world, but progress towards them, in practical terms, is best made through specific, time-bound objectives that do not permit governments simply to pass on responsibility to future administrations and generations. Central to the agenda is a series of concrete objectives for human development, the MDGs, with a deadline of 2015 for the accomplishment of several major development concerns: child survival, poverty, hunger, education, gender equality and empowerment, maternal health, safe water,

HIV/AIDS, malaria and other major diseases, among other objectives.

Many of these goals share similar objectives to those set at the 1990 World Summit for Children, and every one of the MDGs is connected to the well-being of children – from eradicating extreme poverty and hunger to protecting the environment for future generations. Furthermore, the MDGs have unified the international community around a set of common development goals, creating a rare opportunity to improve the lives of children, who now make up more than 40 per cent of the developing world's population and half the population in the least developed countries.³

'A World Fit for Children' endorses all the ambitions of the Millennium Declaration and the MDGs. It enriches the Millennium agenda by emphasizing the importance of taking actions in the best interests of children to ensure that children are put first, that every child is taken care of and that no child is left out.⁴ The compact is based on four main axes. The first, second and fourth seek to promote healthy lives, provide quality education and combat HIV/AIDS, respectively. In effect, they articulate subtargets and courses of action that will help achieve the MDGs for children. The third axis

addresses protection for children against conflict and all forms of abuse, exploitation and violence. As this report attests, the lack of these protections not only undermines a child's well-being, but also increases the risk of exclusion from essential services.⁵

Meeting the Millennium Development Goals

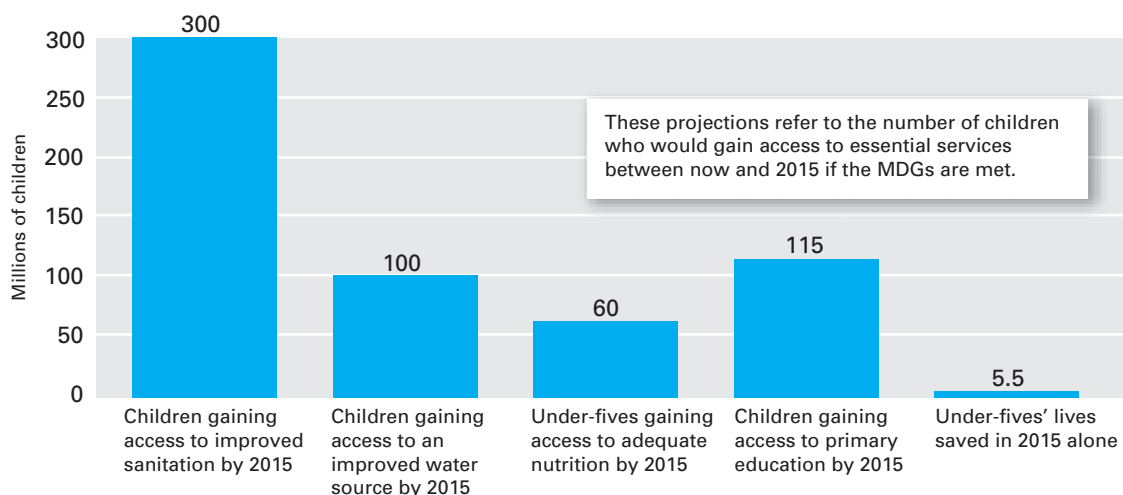
Reaching the MDGs will improve the lives and prospects of millions of children

Achievement of the MDGs, though not a panacea for childhood's ills, would certainly go a long way towards making the world a better place for children. Simply put, if the goals are met over the next 10 years, millions of children will be spared illness, premature death, extreme poverty or malnutrition and will enjoy good-quality schooling, as well as access to safe water and decent sanitation facilities (see *Figure 1.1*).

The implications for children of missing the MDGs would be grave

Missing the MDGs would have devastating implications for the children of this generation, and for the adults they will become if they survive their childhoods. At current rates of progress, for example, 8.7 million

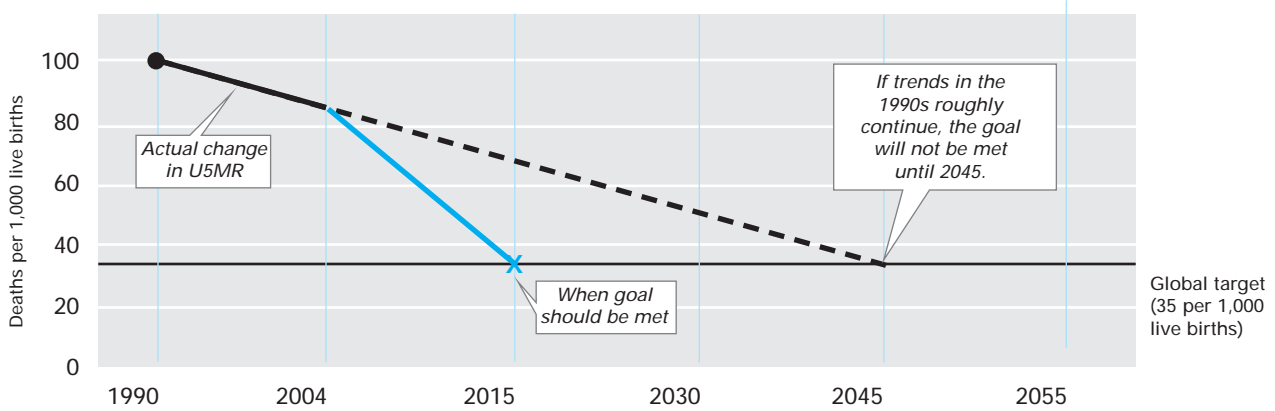
Figure 1.1: Meeting the MDGs would transform millions of children's lives in the next 10 years



Source: UNICEF projections based on data in Statistical Tables 1-10, pp. 95-137 of this report. Notes on the methodology employed can be found in the References section, p. 89.

Figure 1.2: Global progress towards reducing under-five mortality by two thirds*

At current rates of progress the goal will be reached 30 years late



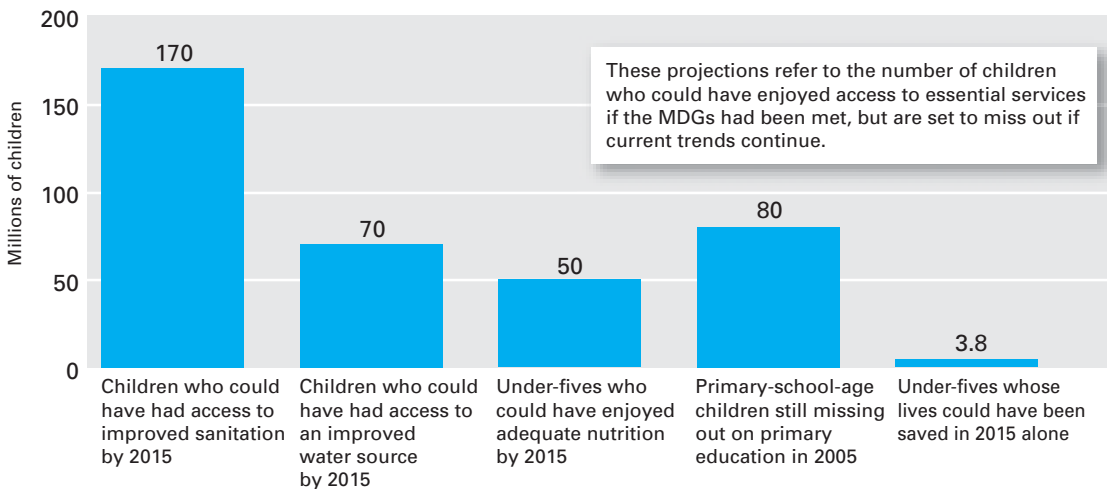
*Trends relate to developing countries only. For a list of developing countries, see p. 132.

Source: UNICEF projections based on under-five mortality data in Statistical Table 1, p. 101 of this report. Notes on methodology employed can be found in the References section, p. 89.

children under five will still die in 2015, whereas if the target were met 3.8 million of those lives would be saved in that year alone.⁶ Similar calculations can be made for most of the other MDGs (see Figure 1.3). Meeting the goals is, therefore, a matter of life or death, of development or regression, for millions of children. It will also be crucial to the progress of their countries and societies.

The generational implications of missing the targets would also be grave. Children in the early years are particularly vulnerable: Deprivation at this stage affects human beings throughout their whole life cycle. Those who are neglected or abused in the first years of life suffer damage from which they may never fully recover and that may prevent them from reaching their full potential as older children, adolescents and

Figure 1.3: At current rates of progress on the MDGs, millions of children who could have been reached will miss out



Source: UNICEF projections based on data in Statistical Tables 1-10, pp. 95-137 of this report. Notes on the methodology employed can be found in the References section, p. 89.

eventually as adults. Malnutrition not only weakens children physically, it also impairs their ability to learn. Those who do not complete primary school are less likely to have the literacy, numeracy and cognitive skills that improve their prospects of earning a decent income in adulthood. Children orphaned by HIV/AIDS are also at risk of missing out on school and the protection of a family that is an essential element of their development. Those subjected to violence, abuse or exploitation may endure psychosocial trauma that can affect them throughout their adult lives.

But it is not only these children who will suffer. Countries struggle to develop when their citizens grow up malnourished, poorly educated or ravaged by disease. These factors perpetuate poverty and low productivity and may lead to instability or even spill over into violence and armed conflict. The healthy development of children not only safeguards their own well-being, it is also the best guarantee of the future peace, prosperity and security that are central ambitions of the Millennium agenda.

The MDGs can be achieved – but urgent action is required

Though global progress towards the goals since 2000 has fallen below aspirations in some regions and countries, there is a broad consensus that they can still be achieved – in full and on time – provided that the necessary political will is demonstrated and the appropriate action taken.

Over the course of 2005, the Member States of the United Nations have coalesced around a set of key initiatives to accelerate progress towards the MDGs and to ensure that the gains made are sustainable and irreversible. These recommendations form a two-pronged strategy. First, a massive push must boost access to essential services for those children and families currently missing out. These immediate interventions – dubbed ‘quick impact initiatives’ – are outlined in detail in the 2005 report of the Millennium Project, recommended in the UN Secretary-General’s report, and were endorsed by world leaders at the 2005 World Summit.⁷ If implemented, they can

provide a vital kick-start to human development and poverty reduction.

But they are only an initial step. Longer-term initiatives that are rooted in a human rights-based approach to development, many of which are already under way, must be stepped up or launched at the same time as the immediate interventions. This will help ensure that the immediate interventions are as effective as possible. Experience has shown that top-down, supply-driven approaches to development, though often effective at increasing access to essential services and goods in the short to medium term, are not sustainable in the longer term. If national capacities are not built up and processes are not driven by national governments and local communities, even those interventions that are initially successful risk failure when international assistance diminishes or political priorities change.

The Millennium agenda: A beginning, not an end

The Millennium agenda is a key step towards meeting our commitments to children in the 21st century

Adopting the recommended immediate interventions and longer-term initiatives will increase the chances that the MDGs will be met by 2015. But in spite of the comprehensive nature of these strategies, there are millions of children who may not be reached by these initiatives alone. These are the children who are currently beyond the reach of laws, budgets, programmes, research and, often, the governments, organizations and individuals seeking to fulfil their rights. Not only do these children face exclusion from essential health-care services, education, safe drinking water and decent sanitation in the present, they are also likely to face exclusion from full participation in society as adults. Many of them suffer from protection violations that heighten the risk of their exclusion and make them, in effect, invisible. As this report will attest, only deeper approaches to child development, with special attention given to the most vulnerable children, will enable us to fulfil our commitments to children and ensure that the MDGs benefit the poorest.

The exclusion of these children, or any children, from the services, protection and opportunities that are theirs by right is unacceptable. The principles of universality and non-discrimination that underlie the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Millennium Declaration and 'A World Fit for Children' must provide the framework for our actions concerning children and adolescents. Our commitments to children must not, under any circumstances, merely pay lip service to these principles while tacitly accepting that some children will remain hungry, in poor health and without education or protection from harm. Having ratified these binding international agreements, national governments – and the international institutions and civil society organizations that support them in their efforts – have obligations, both moral and legal, to do their utmost to ensure that no child is left out.

The Millennium agenda must, therefore, be seen as a driving force, with 2015 as a stepping stone, to providing universal access to essential services, protection and participation to children. To this end, those countries falling behind on the MDGs, the broader aims of the Millennium Declaration and the protection values championed by 'A World Fit for Children' must redouble their efforts to meet them, with ample support from donors and international agencies. Similarly, those countries deemed to be on course to meet specific goals, or the MDGs as a whole, should not rest on their laurels but strive to go beyond the headline targets of the goals to meet the challenge of eliminating disparities in children's health, education and access to essential services.

The remaining chapters of this *State of the World's Children* report will highlight the plight of the children in danger of being forgotten as the world focuses on achieving the MDGs. Ironically, these are the very children likely to be most in need of care and protection – the poorest and the most vulnerable, the exploited and the abused. As the world continues to press ahead with policies, programmes and funding to make the vision outlined in the Millennium Declaration a reality, it must not allow these children, who are excluded, marginalized and often invisible, to be forgotten.

Defining exclusion and invisibility of children

For the purposes of this report, children are considered as excluded relative to other children if they are deemed at risk of missing out on an environment that protects them from violence, abuse and exploitation, or if they are unable to access essential services and goods in a way that threatens their ability to participate fully in society in the future. Children may be excluded by their family, the community, government, civil society, the media, the private sector and other children.

The exclusion described in this report is closely related to the concept of social exclusion. Like poverty, there is no commonly agreed-upon definition of social exclusion, though it is a widely acknowledged phenomenon.^a Governments, institutions, academics and international organizations all view exclusion differently, yielding a rich, but sometimes confusing, tapestry of perspectives. Yet amid the intellectual debates about the definition of exclusion, there is some degree of consensus about its main factors and aspects.

There is broad agreement that exclusion is multidimensional, including deprivations of economic, social, gender, cultural and political rights, making exclusion a much broader concept than material poverty. The concept of exclusion includes the reinforcing socio-political factors that are the basis of discrimination and disadvantage within society, requiring a strong focus on the processes and agents behind deprivation to guarantee inclusion and equality of opportunity.

Beyond these broad principles, there is considerably less agreement regarding the dimensions of exclusion. But there are three common elements – relativity, agency and dynamics – that are widely regarded as central:^b

- **Relativity:** Exclusion can only be judged by comparing the circumstances of some individuals, groups and communities relative to others at a given place and time.
- **Agency:** People are excluded by the act of some agent. This focus on agency can help in the identification of the cause of exclusion and ways to remedy it.
- **Dynamics:** Exclusion may be based on bleak future prospects, not just current circumstances.

Exclusion from essential services and goods such as adequate food, health care and schooling clearly affects children's ability to participate in their communities and societies in both the present and the future. But there are also other rights violations – particularly child protection abuses and state neglect of children living outside the family environment – that restrict children's freedom and movement, limiting their representation or identification as a child who holds special rights. Like the dimensions of exclusion, these factors often overlap and intertwine, each exacerbating the next until, at the extremes, some excluded children are made invisible – denied their rights, physically unseen in their communities, unable to attend school and obscured from official view through absence from statistics, policies and programmes.

See References, page 89.

Equality in Education: The Universal Challenge

Millennium Development Goal 2, which calls for every boy and girl to complete primary schooling, is the only goal that is universal in its scope. As such, it reminds the world community of the need to focus explicitly on those children who might currently be excluded from the classroom.

Children living in the least developed countries, the poorest communities, and the most impoverished households are less likely to be enrolled in, or be able to regularly attend school, as are children in rural areas, children with disabilities and those living in areas affected by armed conflict. Children from ethnic and linguistic minorities face additional barriers as they struggle to learn the language of instruction. Getting children into school is only the beginning, however. Ensuring that they attend school regularly and complete their studies with the skills that will allow them to achieve future success are the ultimate objectives.

In many countries, girls are less likely to attend school than boys, particularly at higher levels of education. Gender parity for all levels of education, a key target of Millennium Development Goal 3, is an essential component of transforming gender relations and guaranteeing that boys and girls are provided with equal opportunities to reach their full potential. In 2005, 54 countries were found to require additional efforts to achieve this goal.* They must be supported to undertake the initiatives to achieve equality in education by 2015.

Ensuring that every child receives a primary education will require additional resources, but this goal cannot be seen as optional or unattainable. Putting every boy and girl in the world in a good-quality primary school would cost between \$7 billion and \$17 billion per year – a relatively small amount compared to other government expenditures.** The benefits of such an investment would be immeasurable in terms of the health, productivity and social well-being of children today and of future generations.

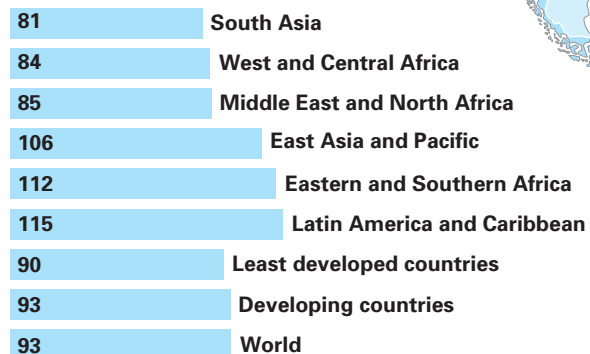
* UNICEF, *Progress For Children: A report card on gender parity and primary education (No. 2)*, UNICEF, New York, June 2005.

** UN Millennium Project, Task Force on Education and Gender Equality, *Toward universal primary education: investments, incentives, and institutions*, Earthscan, London, 2005, p. 9.

MDG 2 and MDG 3 call for governments and international donors and agencies to include all children currently excluded from education. The universal challenge of these goals embodies the spirit of the Millennium agenda, which seeks to reach out to the excluded, especially children.

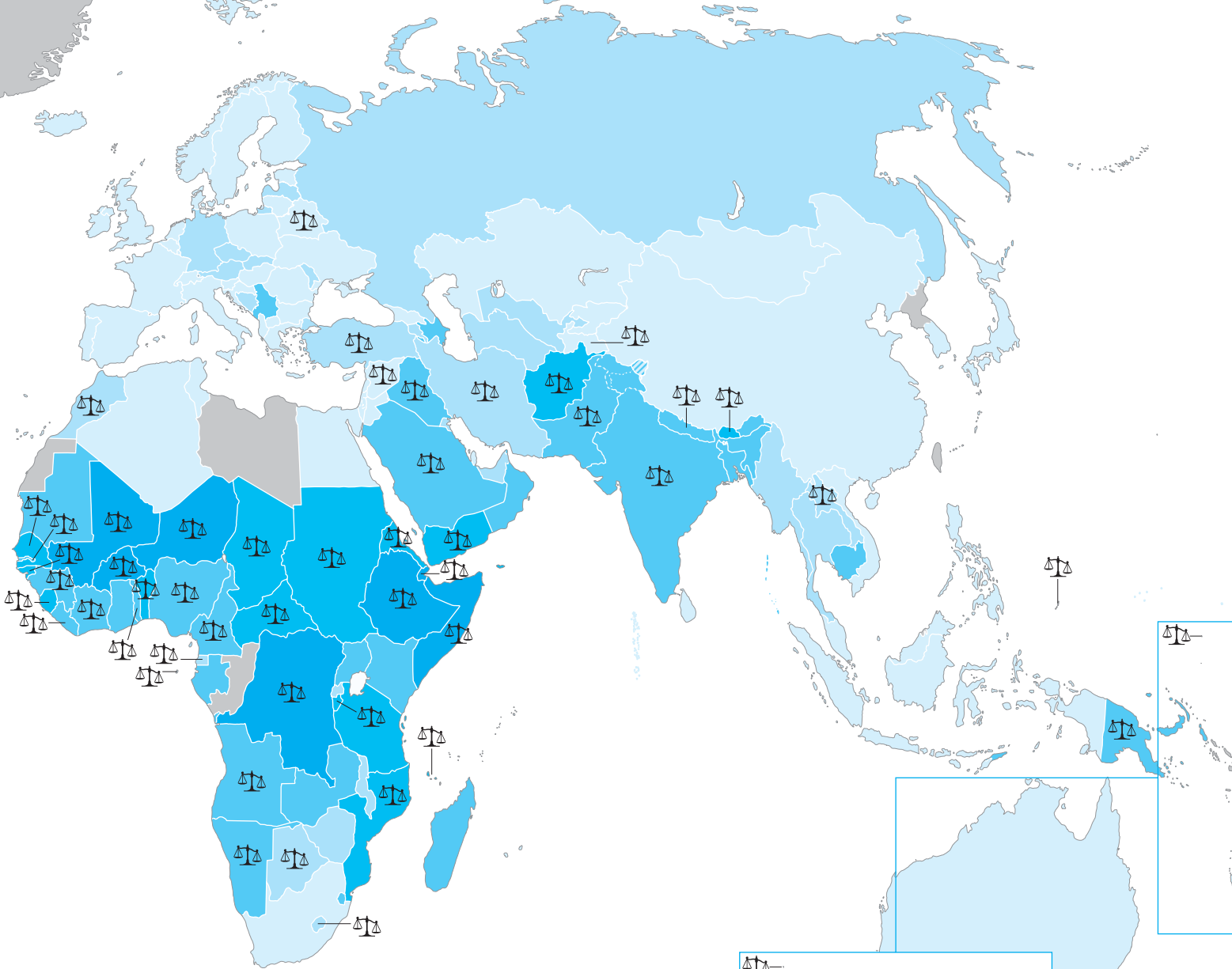


Girls' secondary school attendance ratios in relation to boys' (Girls per 100 boys)

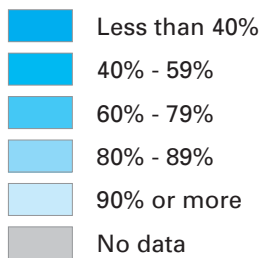


Source: Derived from UNESCO Institute for Statistics data (1998-2002), including the Education for All 2000 Assessment, as reported in Statistical Table 5, pp. 114-117.

Education for All



**Proportion of school-aged children in school:
Net enrolment ratio in primary education**

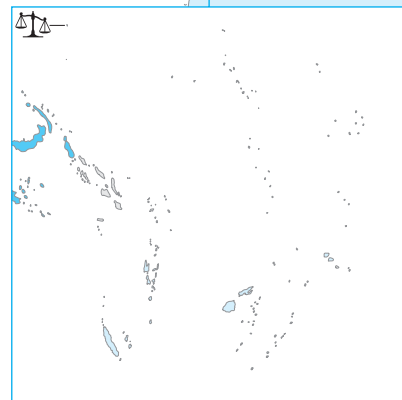


Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2005.



Countries in which additional efforts are required to reach the gender parity goal

Source: UNICEF, *Progress for Children: A report card on gender parity and primary education (No. 2)*, UNICEF, New York, June 2005.



This map does not reflect a position by UNICEF on the legal status of any country or territory or the delimitation of any frontiers. Dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties.