



The number of children under five years of age dying each year declined from more than 12 million in 1990 to 7.6 million in 2010, according to UNICEF and the World Health Organization. These new figures show that compared to 1990, around 12,000 more children's lives are saved each day.

An annual report on child mortality found that in sub-Saharan Africa, the region with the highest number of under-five deaths in the world, the speed at which the under-five mortality rate is declining doubled from 1.2% a year during 1990-2000 to 2.4% a year during 2000-2010.

Some of the greatest improvements are in countries where children are most vulnerable.

One example is Niger, where the 1990 under-five mortality rate was 311 per 1,000 live births. To address the often large distances between people and health centres, a strategy of deploying trained community health workers to deliver high-impact interventions at thousands of new health posts across the country was used. In 2010, Niger was one of the five countries with the greatest absolute reductions in overall under-five mortality rates, together with Malawi, Liberia, Timor-Leste and Sierra Leone.

Newborns and infants are the most at risk of dying, and there has been less progress for them than within the under-five age category as a whole. More than 40% of under-five deaths occur within the first month of life and over 70% in the first year of life.

The improvements and progress are encouraging – but stark disparities persist. Sub-Saharan Africa is still home to the highest rates of child mortality, with one in eight children dying before reaching five – more than 17 times the average for developed regions (1 in 143). Southern Asia has the second highest rates with 1 in 15 children dying before age five.

Under-five deaths are increasingly concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia. In 1990, 69% of under-five deaths occurred in these two regions – in 2010 that proportion increased to 82%. About half of all under five deaths in the world took place in just five countries in 2010: India, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Pakistan and China.