

Goal

Reduction of the rate of low birthweight (less than 2.5 kg) to less than 10 per cent

Better data on birthweight needed

Many infants in developing countries are not weighed at birth. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, it is estimated that nearly 75 per cent of newborns are not weighed. In other regions, the percentages range from 20 per cent to 82 per cent. Much of the available data on low birthweight are, therefore, not representative of the general population and are often underestimates. A major effort is needed to improve the quality of data.

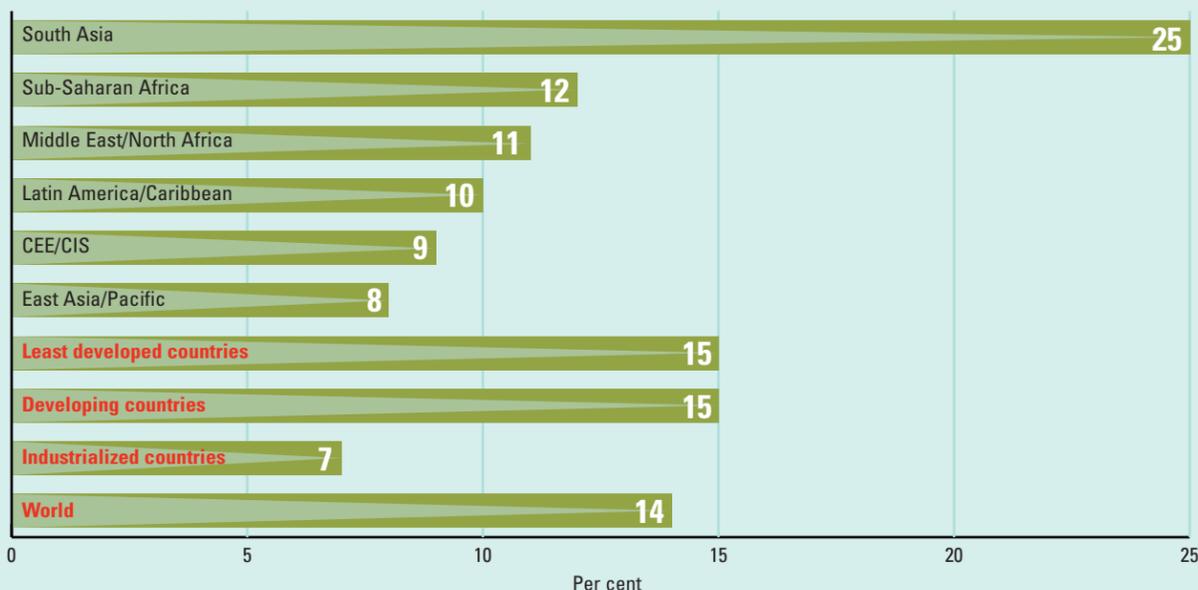
Region	Percentage not weighed or birthweight unknown
Sub-Saharan Africa	73
Middle East/North Africa	82
South Asia	77
East Asia/Pacific	40
Latin America/Caribbean	20
CEE/CIS	25
Developing countries	65
Least developed countries	77

» Low Birthweight



South Asia has highest number of low-birthweight infants

Percentage of infants weighing less than 2.5 kg at birth



Result

Many infants in developing countries are not weighed at birth. However, available data suggest that in 100 developing countries, low-birthweight rates are below 10 per cent.

... but

An estimated 18 million babies worldwide are born each year with low birthweight – 9.3 million of them in South Asia and 3.1 million in sub-Saharan Africa.

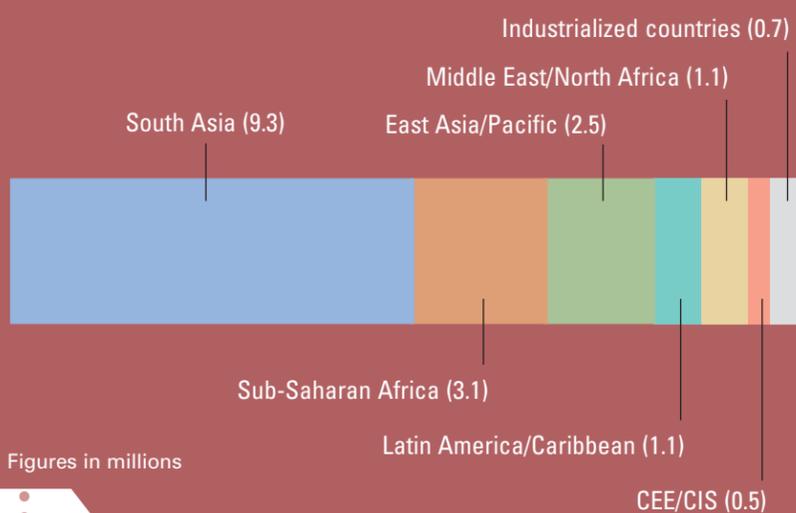
Issue

Low-birthweight babies (those weighing less than 2.5 kg) face a greatly increased risk of dying during their early months and years. Those who survive have impaired immune function and face increased risk of disease, including that of diabetes and heart disease later in life. They are also likely to remain malnourished and to have lower IQ and cognitive disabilities leading to school failure and learning difficulties.

Weight at birth is a good indicator not only of the mother's health and nutritional status but also of the newborn's chances for survival, growth, long-term health and psychosocial development.

18 million low-birthweight babies

South Asia has half of the world's smallest infants



Figures in millions

Source for all graphs: UNICEF, 2001.