

# PART II: SUBREGIONAL INSIGHTS

On which Goals and SDG Targets have subregions in Asia and the Pacific excelled, stalled, or reversed progress?

This section assesses SDG progress for each of the five subregions of Asia and the Pacific<sup>4</sup>. Of the 105 SDG indicators used for assessing progress for the Asia-Pacific region, only 80 could be used for subregional progress assessment due to lack of data. Therefore, results for subregions should not be compared with regional assessment results in Figures 1 and 3<sup>5</sup>.

This report is presenting results for five subregions in Asia and the Pacific. The Asia-Pacific SDG Gateway<sup>6</sup> provides more subregional results for different country groupings (such as ASEAN, SIDS, LDCs, etc.).

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4 For subregional breakdown, see Annex 1 – Figures on SDG progress across Asia-Pacific by subregion

5 See Annex 3 – Table of indicators selected for SDG progress assessment

6 <http://data.unescap.org/>

# 1. DIFFERENT SUBREGIONS, DIFFERENT CHALLENGES

## East and North-East Asia

East and North-East Asia is the leading subregion on no poverty (Goal 1) and zero hunger (Goal 2). However, since 2000, East and North-East Asia has regressed in sustainable cities and communities (Goal 11), climate action (Goal 13) and life on land (Goal 15). All measured targets in Goals 4 (quality education), 5 (gender equality), 7 (affordable and clean energy), 11 (sustainable cities and communities), 12 (responsible consumption and production), 13 (climate action) and 14 (life below water) require intensified efforts, with some needing a dramatic turnaround in order to be achieved. At the Indicator level, the top five in need of course correction are protection of forests and ocean health (15.1.1 and 14.2.P1), formal and informal education and training (4.3.1), concentration of PM2.5 air pollutants (11.6.P1) and the number of refugees (16.b.P2).

## South-East Asia

While South-East Asia leads other subregions in quality education (Goal 4), affordable and clean energy (Goal 7) and industry, innovation and infrastructure (Goal 9), many targets within these Goals will not be achieved if the development pace is not accelerated, notably for renewable energy (7.2). The South-East Asia subregion moved backwards on decent work and economic growth (Goal 8), climate action (Goal 13), and peace, justice and strong institutions (Goal 16). Areas requiring immediate action to reverse trends include harmful use of alcohol (3.5.2) and shrinking above ground forest biomass (15.2.P1), along with a number of other social and environmental indicators.

## South and South-West Asia

The South and South-West Asia subregion's progress leads other subregions on good health and well-being (Goal 3) and decent work and economic growth (Goal 8). It is moving in the wrong direction on clean water and sanitation (Goal 6), responsible consumption and production (Goal 12) and climate action (Goal 13). Top indicators calling for urgent action include permanent water body extent (6.6.1), sulphur dioxide emissions (12.4.P1), and greenhouse gas emissions (13.2.P2).

## North and Central Asia

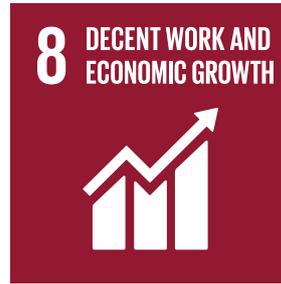
North and Central Asia leads other subregions on six goals: clean water and sanitation (Goal 6), reduced inequalities (Goal 10), responsible consumption and production (Goal 12), climate action (Goal 13), life below water (Goal 14) and peace, justice and strong institutions (Goal 16), although data is limited on for many of these Goals. Nevertheless, since 2000, there has been a decline on gender equality (Goal 5), decent work and economic growth (Goal 8), and sustainable cities and communities (Goal 11). Top trends that require reversing are declines in growth rate in real GDP per employed person (8.2.1) as well as per capita (8.1.1), and reductions in organized learning before primary entry age (4.2.2).

## The Pacific

The Pacific is the leading subregion on gender equality (Goal 5), sustainable cities and communities (Goal 11), life on land (Goal 15) and partnerships for the goals (Goal 17), although data is limited for Goal 15. While progress advanced on good health and well-being (Goal 3) and industry, innovation and infrastructure (Goal 9), since 2000 the Pacific subregion has regressed on zero hunger (Goal 2), decent work and economic growth (Goal 8), life below water (Goal 14) and peace, justice and strong institutions (Goal 16). Of the top five indicators that need course correction, three are environmental: sustainable forest management (15.2.1), Red List Index (15.5.1), and renewable energy share (7.2.1).

## 2. GOAL-BY-GOAL: FINDING SUBREGIONAL DISPARITIES

This section analyses the Goals across the subregions, using four categories: first, Goals where most of the subregions are regressing or severely under-performing while one or two subregions achieved progress; second, Goals where most subregions are advancing in the right direction, but leaving at least one subregion far behind; third, Goals where every single subregion is under-performing; and fourth, Goals where all subregions have progressed in the right direction.



### There are two Goals where most of the subregions need to reverse current trends

There are two Goals where more than half the subregions in Asia-Pacific are regressing or severely under-performing: decent work and economic growth (Goal 8) and climate action (Goal 13).

**Decent work and economic growth (Goal 8)** Four subregions in Asia-Pacific have regressed or made little progress (**North and Central Asia, South-East Asia, South-South West Asia and the Pacific**). **South and South-West Asia** needs to ramp up progress to achieve Goal 8 (Figure 7). Per capita economic growth (8.1) is projected to worsen in four subregions and economic diversity (8.2) in three (Figure 8).

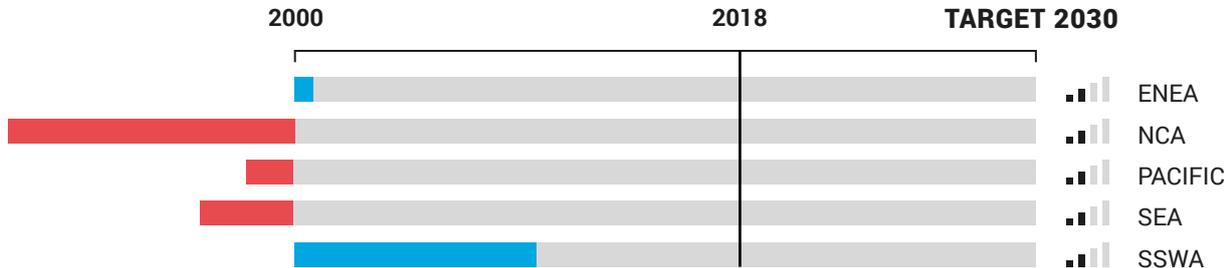


Figure 7 – Goal 8 snapshot by subregion

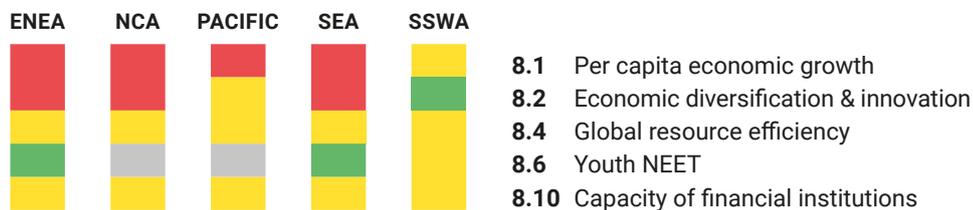


Figure 8 – Goal 8 dashboard by subregion

**Climate Action (Goal 13)** Except for **North and Central Asia** and **the Pacific**, every other subregion in Asia-Pacific needs to reverse existing trends on climate action (Figure 9) as measured by emissions of

greenhouse gases (13.2.P2) and carbon dioxide from fuel combustion (13.2.P1) (Figure 10). Lack of evidence makes it difficult to offer anything more than a cursory assessment of this Goal.

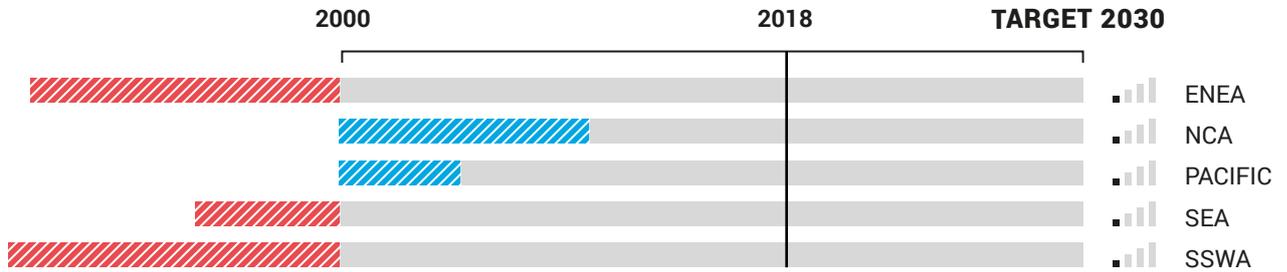


Figure 9 – Goal 13 snapshot by subregion

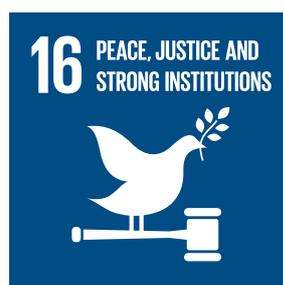


Figure 10 – Goal 13 dashboard by subregion

### At least one subregion is being left behind for seven Goals

There are seven Goals where most subregions are advancing in the right direction but leaving at least one subregion far behind: zero hunger (Goal 2), gender equality (Goal 5), clean water and sanitation (Goal 6),

industry, innovation and infrastructure (Goal 9), sustainable cities and communities (Goal 11), responsible consumption and production (Goal 12) and peace, justice and strong institutions (Goal 16).



**Zero Hunger (Goal 2)** The Pacific has fallen behind the furthest on zero hunger (Goal 2) compared to other subregions (Figure 11). While other subregions made gains, the Pacific struggles with high prevalence of undernourishment (2.1.1). Four subregions are

anticipated to miss the targets of agricultural productivity (2.3), sustainable food production (2.4), and genetic diversity (2.5), except for **East and North-East Asia**, where recent trends have been positive (Figure 12).

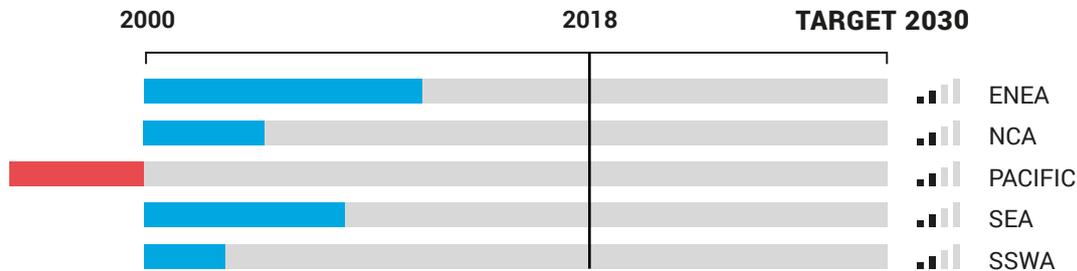


Figure 11 – Goal 2 snapshot by subregion



Figure 12 – Goal 2 dashboard by subregion

**Gender equality (Goal 5)** North and Central Asia is the only subregion in Asia-Pacific where gender equality (Goal 5) has worsened since 2000 (Figure 13). No subregion is on-track for the two SDG Targets

assessed in this Goal: discrimination against women (5.1) and women in leadership (5.5), whereas the former is estimated to worsen in the Pacific (Figure 14).

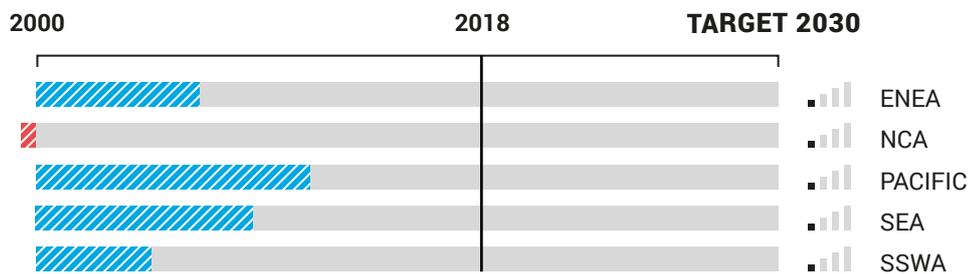


Figure 13 – Goal 5 snapshot by subregion

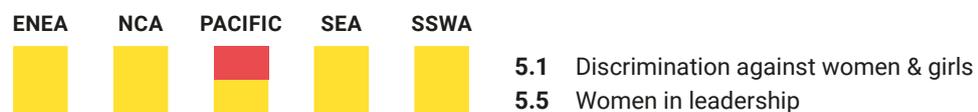


Figure 14 – Goal 5 dashboard by subregion

**Clean water and sanitation (Goal 6)** At the subregional level, data availability is poor and limited to only two indicators that show **South and South-West Asia** regressing from 2000 levels (Figure 15). The same subregion has successfully increased access to safely managed sanitation services (6.2), measured by the

practice of open defecation (6.2.1), but regressed the most on change in water-related ecosystems (6.6), represented by the permanent water body extent (6.6.1). **North and Central Asia** leads among the subregions in the estimates for 2030 (Figure 16).

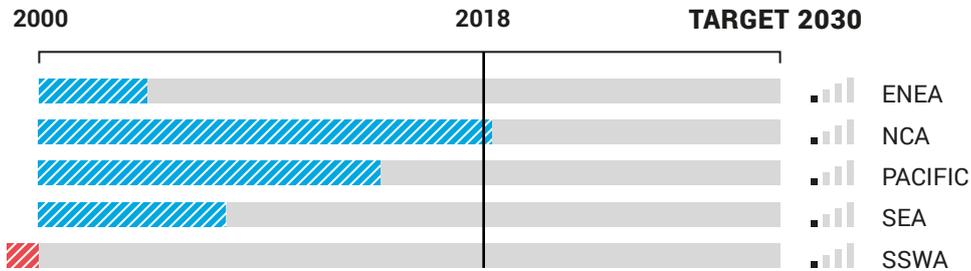


Figure 15 – Goal 6 snapshot by subregion



Figure 16 – Goal 6 dashboard by subregion

**Industry, innovation and infrastructure (Goal 9)** **North and Central Asia** and **South and South-West Asia** have made minimal progress on industry, innovation and infrastructure (Goal 9) – almost imperceptible for the latter subregion – with other subregions advancing

much farther ahead (Figure 17). Medium and high-tech industry value added (9.b.1) is an indicator that both subregions need to reverse trends to catch up with the rest of the subregions (Figure 18).

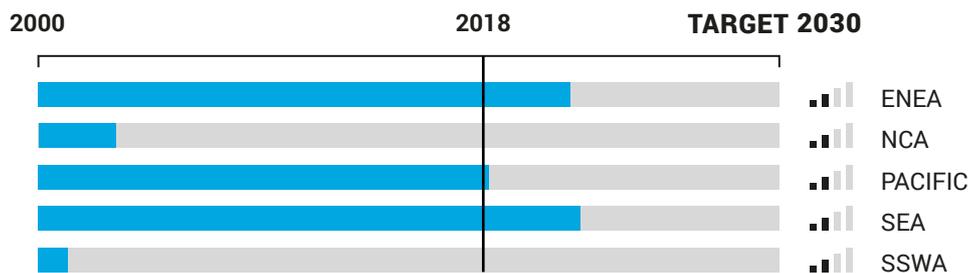


Figure 17 – Goal 9 snapshot by subregion

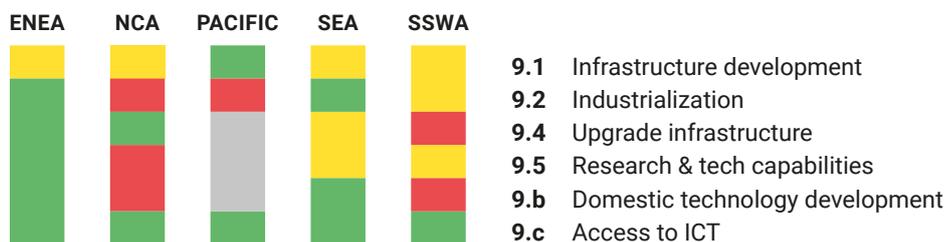


Figure 18 – Goal 9 dashboard by subregion

**Sustainable cities and communities (Goal 11)** Two subregions in Asia-Pacific (**North and Central Asia** and **East and North-East Asia**) have regressed since 2000 (Figure 19). Air quality (11.6), measured by PM2.5

concentration (11.6.P1), and road traffic (11.2) are two stumbling blocks for subregions in Asia-Pacific, although **the Pacific** is more on track for these targets compared to other subregions (Figure 20).

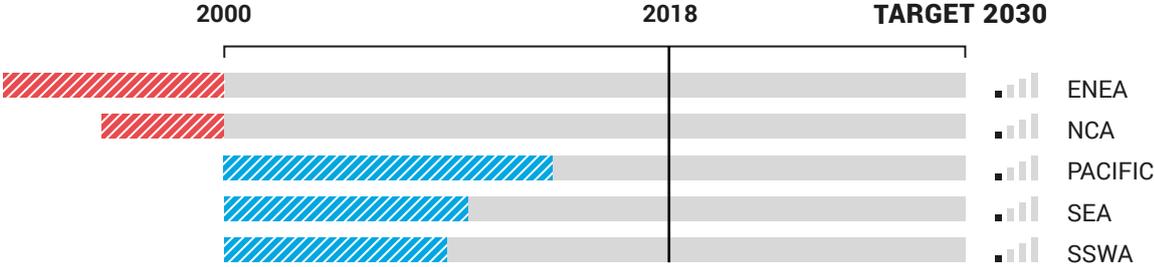


Figure 19 – Goal 11 snapshot by subregion

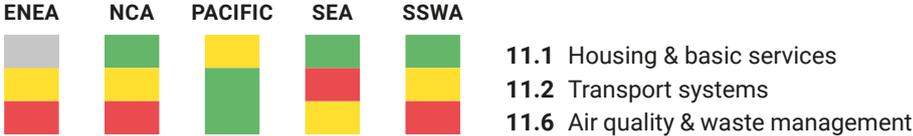


Figure 20 – Goal 11 dashboard by subregion

**Responsible consumption and production (Goal 12)** **South and South-West Asia** needs to reverse current progress, and two subregions (**East and North-East Asia** and **South-East Asia**) need extra effort to get on track (Figure 21). Work toward sustainable use of natural

resources (12.2) needs acceleration in every subregion, and management of chemical wastes (12.4), measured by sulphur dioxide emissions (12.4.P1), require turnaround in three subregions (Figure 22).

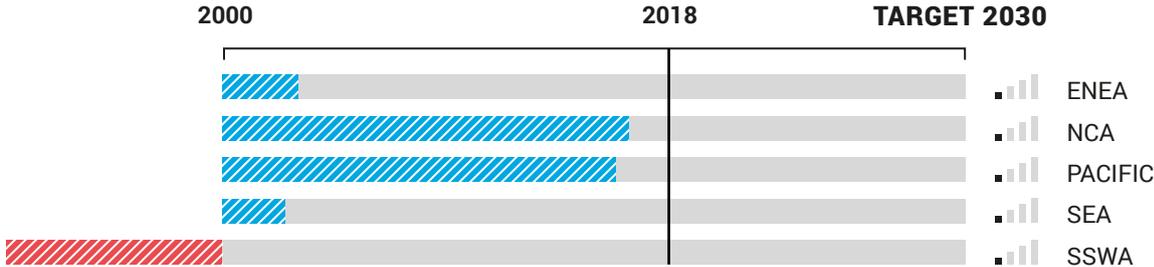


Figure 21 – Goal 12 snapshot by subregion

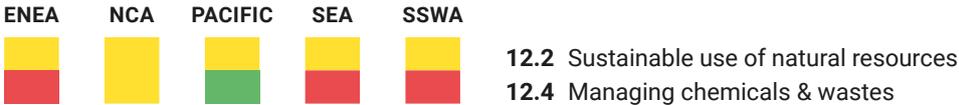


Figure 22 – Goal 12 dashboard by subregion

**Peace, justice and strong institutions (Goal 16)**

Based on available data, two subregions (**South-East Asia** and **the Pacific**) need to reverse trends to meet Goal 16 by 2030 (Figure 23) while a third subregion, **East and North-East Asia**, needs to make extra effort. A sharp

drop in intentional homicide (16.1.1) in **East and North-East Asia** and **South and South-West Asia** (Figure 24) put those subregions on track to achieve violence reduction (16.1).

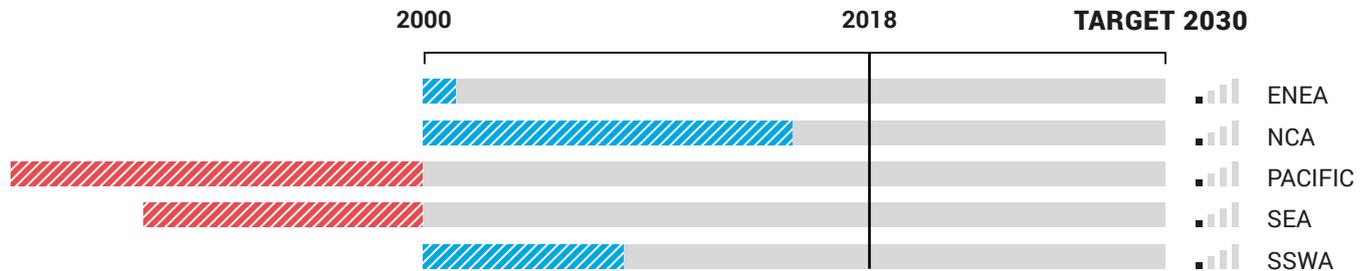


Figure 23 – Goal 16 snapshot by subregion



Figure 24 – Goal 16 dashboard by subregion

**There are two environmental Goals where all subregions are making little progress**

There are two environmental Goals where every single subregion, based on available data, is under-performing: life below water (Goal 14) and life on land (Goal 15).

**Life below water (Goal 14)** Due to insufficient data, only two indicators are used to assess life below water (Goal 14). The proportion of protected marine key biodiversity areas (14.5.1) needs to increase significantly across all subregions, while the Ocean Health Index (14.2.P1) is deteriorating in four of five subregions in Asia and the Pacific (**North and Central Asia** is mostly landlocked thus not enough data is available to assess progress in this indicator).



**Life on land (Goal 15)** Life on land (Goal 15) is at risk across all subregions if terrestrial and inland freshwater (15.1), forests (15.2) and mountain ecosystems (15.4) are not better managed. Little progress since 2000 is witnessed in most subregions. Loss of biodiversity (15.5), measured by the Red List Index (15.5.1), requires a reversal of existing trends in all subregions except **East and North-East Asia**.

## All subregions are advancing in the right direction for six Goals

There are six Goals where every subregion is making progress, with no subregion lagging: no poverty (Goal 1), good health and well-being (Goal 3), quality education (Goal 4), affordable and clean energy (Goal 7), reduced inequalities (Goal 10) and partnerships for the goals (Goal 17).

**No poverty (Goal 1)** All five subregions in Asia-Pacific are on-track to achieve the SDG Targets for eradicating extreme poverty, measured by international poverty rate (1.1.1). However, all need to reverse or accelerate current trends in resource mobilization for ending poverty (1.a). Government spending on health and education (1.a.2) is anticipated to decline in three subregions, except **North and Central Asia** and **East and North-East Asia** where slow improvements are predicted.

**Good health and well-being (Goal 3)** **South and South-West Asia** has made the most progress since 2000 on good health and well-being (Goal 3) relative to other subregions, but needs to speed progress tackling communicable diseases (3.3), health financing (3.c) and road traffic accidents (3.6) to be able to achieve the targets by 2030. **The Pacific** has made notable progress, but needs to reverse trends on communicable diseases (3.3). **East and North-East Asia** must also reverse trends on communicable diseases (3.3) as well as substance abuse (3.5). **South-East Asia** must reverse trends in substance abuse (3.5) and road traffic (3.6). Harmful use of alcohol (3.5.2) is the SDG Indicator expected to be the furthest off-target in **South-East Asia** and is among the top regressing indicators in **East and North-East Asia** and **North and Central Asia**. In **North and Central Asia**, 20 per cent of the indicators requiring turnaround are health-related, including HIV infections (3.3.1), adolescent births (3.7.2) and harmful use of alcohol (3.5.2).



**Quality education (Goal 4)** **South-East Asia** leads progress for quality education (Goal 4) across all subregions in Asia-Pacific, including on the number of qualified teachers (4.c), where **South and South-West Asia** is also on-track. But no subregion is expected to achieve the targets under quality education (Goal 4) and need to accelerate the pace of work to achieve them. The disparity in quality of education across the region is illustrated by the fact that in Indonesia and Thailand, 51 and 57 percent of females and 38 and 41 percent of males, respectively, achieved minimum reading proficiency by the end of lower secondary (4.1.1), while these rates are 96 and 91 per cent, respectively, in Hong Kong, China, 2015 data shows.

**Affordable and clean energy (Goal 7)** **South-East Asia** has made more progress on affordable and clean energy (Goal 7) than any other subregion. Along with **South and South-West Asia**, the two subregions can expect to achieve 2030 Targets by maintaining the current pace of progress on all Targets except for renewable energy consumption (7.2), where every subregion in Asia-Pacific needs to reverse a downward trend or accelerate progress.

**Reduced inequalities (Goal 10)** Limited evidence on reduced inequalities (Goal 10) shows **North and Central Asia** expected to achieve Goal 10 in 2030 if it can maintain current progress. Based on the two indicators with enough data to measure progress, all other subregions are trailing.

**Partnerships for the Goals (Goal 17)** All Asia-Pacific subregions are making progress on partnerships for the Goals (Goal 17), but not enough to achieve the SDG Targets. Official development assistance for technical cooperation (17.9.1) and fixed broadband access (17.6.2) are two indicators that all subregions need to substantially accelerate. All subregions also need to increase the pace of mobilization of resources for strengthening statistical capacities in developing countries (17.19), while the current positive trend needs to be maintained in **South-East Asia**.

### 3. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Asia-Pacific subregions are making progress on different Goals. **East and North-East Asia** is leading other subregions on no poverty (Goal 1) and zero hunger (Goal 2). **South and South-West Asia** is also leading other subregions on two goals: good health and well-being (Goal 3) and decent work and economic growth (Goal 8). **South-East Asia** leads other subregions on three goals: quality education (Goal 4), affordable and clean energy (Goal 7) and industry, innovation and infrastructure (Goal 9). **The Pacific** is the leading subregion for gender equality (Goal 5), sustainable cities and communities (Goal 11), life on land (Goal 15) and partnership for the goals (Goal 17). Six goals are making the most progress in the **North and Central Asia** subregion: clean water and sanitation (Goal 6), reduced inequalities (Goal 10), responsible consumption and production (Goal 12), climate action (Goal 13), life below water (Goal 14) and peace, justice and strong institutions (Goal 16), although data is limited for many of these Goals in **North and Central Asia**.

All Asia-Pacific subregions need to reverse existing trends in at least three Goals. In **North and Central Asia**, progress is regressing in gender equality (Goal 5), decent work and economic growth (Goal 8) and sustainable cities and communities (Goal 11). **South and South-West Asia** is regressing in clean water and sanitation (Goal 6), responsible consumption and production (Goal 12) and climate action (Goal 13). **South-East Asia** is regressing in decent work and economic growth (Goal 8), climate action (Goal 13), and peace, justice and strong institutions (Goal 16). **East and North-East Asia** is regressing in sustainable cities and communities (Goal 11), climate action (Goal 13) and life on land (Goal 15). Four goals are regressing in **the Pacific**: zero hunger (Goal 2), industry, innovation and infrastructure (Goal 9), life below water (Goal 14) and peace, justice and strong institutions (Goal 16).

Three subregions in Asia-Pacific need to reverse trends in climate action. **South-East Asia, South and South-West Asia** and **East and North-East Asia** are all showing negative progress on taking urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

Data scarcity hinders evaluation for subregions in Asia and the Pacific. Lack of robust data complicates attempts to assess progress in every subregion in Asia and the Pacific. Ten out of 17 Goals lack sufficient data to confidently assess progress in the five subregions in Asia and the Pacific.

