# Destitution

## Who and where are the poorest of the poor?

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**Since 2014, OPHI has used more extreme MPI indicators to shine a light on hundreds of millions of people who each day face grinding hardships difficult for most of us to imagine: the destitute, or poorest of the poor. This spotlight reveals that although it would be a tremendous step forward to succeed in eradicating extreme income poverty, we would still risk leaving many of the poorest of the poor behind, whose destitution, surprisingly, is not captured in the $1.25/day measure. Having multiple measures of poverty can thus help ensure uncounted pockets of poverty are not overlooked**

### WHAT IS 'DESTITUTION'?

As discussions around the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) near the finish line, concerns about how to focus global efforts on the poorest of the poor remain a cornerstone of the debate. Yet the meaning of extreme poverty is much contested. If you have $1.26 a day, are you still one of the 'poorest of the poor'? What if you have $2 a day? And how do we know how to focus resources – the regions where the extreme poor live, and what their lives are like?

Our multidimensional measure of destitution is stark, but clear. Are you severely malnourished? Have you watched two of your children – or even more – die? Are you forced to practise open defecation because you have no sanitation? If you say yes to a number of these, could anyone argue that you are not experiencing extreme poverty?

The Global MPI shines a powerful spotlight on the poorest of the poor – which we call the **destitute**. These people are deprived in **at least one third of indicators** used to identify the MPI poor (see box, 'What does it mean to be destitute?'), but according to more **extreme criteria**.

The value the measure of destitution adds is revealed by comparing it to extreme income poverty (by the $1.25/day line). In over a third of countries compared, significant mismatches in the percentage of the population identified as the poorest of the poor are evident. This means that simply by eradicating $1.25/day poverty, we will not eliminate poverty for those suffering some of its worst effects.

## Key Findings

- **Some 733 million people are destitute** in the 82 countries for which we have data.

- **Nearly half** of all MPI poor people in the countries analysed are destitute.

- **Over 90% of destitute people live in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa**. India alone houses 348 million destitute, followed by Nigeria with 57 million and Ethiopia with 52 million.

- **Most destitute people live in Middle Income Countries** (71%).

- **South Sudan has the highest rate of destitute people** (71% of the population). In Niger this figure is 69% and in Chad, 66%.

- **The four regions with the highest rates of destitution– above 85% – are all in Chad.** Some 25 subnational regions have an incidence of destitution above 71%. These regions are part of Chad, Burkina Faso, South Sudan, Nigeria, Niger, Ethiopia, Uganda and Mali.

### WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE DESTITUTE?

| | |
|---|---|
| 39% of destitute people don't have anyone in their home with more than one year of schooling | 25% practise open defecation to relieve themselves |
| 47% have a primary-aged school child out of school in their household | 31% don't have clean water, or must walk 45 minutes to get it |
| 31% live in a household in which at least one woman/man has lost two or more children | 61% have only a dirt floor |
| 49 % have someone at home with severe malnutrition | 77% cook with wood, dung, or straw |
| 35% don't have electricity to turn on their lights | 25% don't even own a mobile phone or a radio – nor a fridge, bicycle, motorcycle or television |

**Measuring destitution**: All destitute people are deprived in at least one-third of the (weighted) indicators mentioned above.

## WHO ARE THE DESTITUTE?

Data on destitution are currently available for 82 of the 101 countries analyzed in the Global MPI 2015 (for more information see box, 'Destitution data'). These 82 countries are home to 1.5 of the 1.6 billion people who are MPI poor. In the countries analyzed, **nearly half of all people identified as MPI poor are also destitute**; in other words, they are experiencing several of the acute disadvantages described above. This has obvious implications for the goal of eradicating extreme poverty, widely mooted as an indicator of the first SDG. It suggests general trends in the reduction of income poverty have not been reflected in the lives of a huge number of people, whose deprivations require different policy responses to solve.

Those identified as destitute by the Global MPI 2015 suffer a range of hardships difficult for most of us to imagine (see box, 'What does it mean to be destitute?').

## HOW DOES DESTITUTION RELATE TO $1.25/DAY POVERTY?

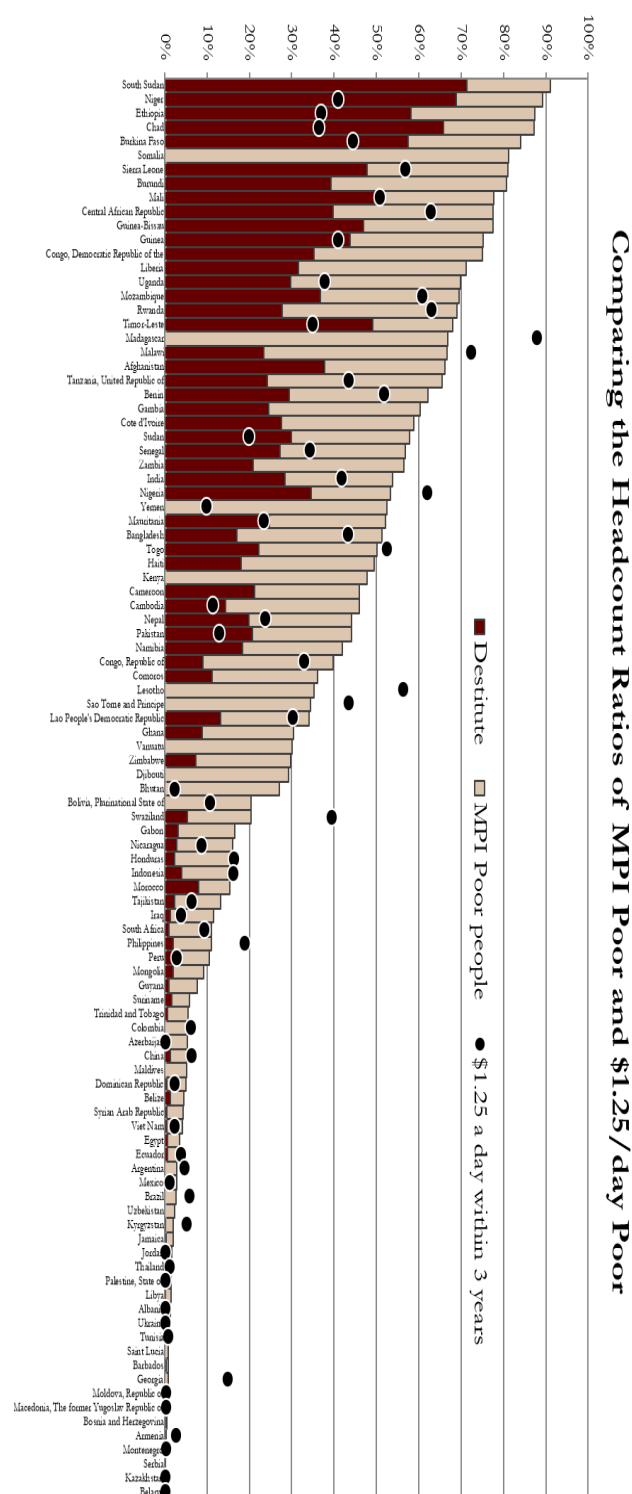### Destitution (vertical) vs $1.25/day poverty headcount ratios (horizontal)
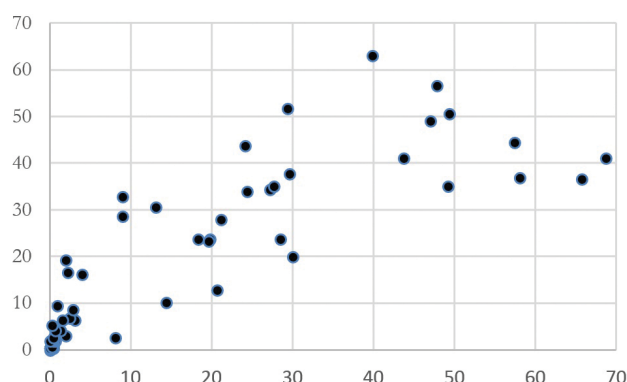


Whilst there is a clear relationship between multidimensional destitution levels and $1.25/day poverty, the differences can also be stark. Ending extreme income poverty – measured by the $1.25/day poverty line – would not, it is clear, eliminate multidimensional destitution.

Indeed, at a very minimum, OPHI's destitution measure identifies as destitute an additional **108 million people** who are not considered poor by the $1.25/day measure.[1] So even if we succeed in 'ending' extreme poverty measured by $1.25/day, their situation would not be addressed. And in fact, the number of destitute who are not in extreme income poverty is likely far higher than this.

For example, according to the $1.25/day figures in the 52 countries for which we have both $1.25/day and destitution estimations from surveys fielded within three years of each other, 667 million people are destitute and 1.02 billion people are $1.25/day poor. In Chad, 66% of people are destitute yet only 36% of the population is poor according to the $1.25/day measure. In Niger 69% are destitute but only 41%

of people are $1.25/day poor. Similarly in Ethiopia, rates of destitution are 21 percentage points higher than income poverty rates, and in Timor Leste and Burkina Faso it is 13 or 14 percentage points.

On the other hand, in Malawi, destitution affects only 22% of the population whereas 73% of people live on less than $1.25/day, so 49% of the population are $1.25/day poor but not destitute. Similarly in Bangladesh, 17% of people are destitute but 43% experience $1.25/day poverty. Such striking mismatches are evident in 21 of the 52 countries with close data years, and 28 of the 71 countries with income data for any year.



Comparing the Headcount Ratios of MPI Poor and $1.25/day Poor

■ Destitute    ▧ MPI Poor people    ● $1.25 a day within 3 years

## WHERE ARE THE DESTITUTE?

Of the 82 countries for which data are available, we found that by far the largest number of destitute people are to be found in **India**; some **347.9 million people or 28.5% of the India population**.[2] Unfortunately India's data are out of date: there are no new data on multidimensional poverty since 2005/6 so the accuracy of this cannot be assessed. If we include the other countries in South Asia for which we have data (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan), we find the number is **427 million people**, or more than **half** of all those experiencing destitution that we have identified in this analysis.

This compares with some **253.7 million destitute people** in Sub-Saharan Africa. The country with the highest number of destitute people in Africa is Nigeria, with 56.7 million destitute people or 35.6% of the population.

Outside South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa the number of destitute people drops dramatically. The country with the **highest number of people living in destitution outside these two regions is Chad**, with 17.8 million people or 1.3% of the population being destitute; the country with **the highest rate of destitution is Haiti**, where 18.1% of the population are destitute.

## GEOGRAPHIC DESTITUTION DATA IN DEPTH

### Sub-Saharan Africa

We now have destitution for 35 of our 39 African countries or 92% of our covered Sub-Saharan African countries. On average, across Africa, **55% of MPI poor people are destitute**. Country experiences in the region vary dramatically. Destitution ranges from a low of **1% in South Africa and 3% in Gabon** to a high of **69% in Niger** and **72% in South Sudan**. More than half of the population are also destitute in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, and Chad. On average across these 35 countries over one third (33.9% or 37.3%) of MPI poor people are also destitute.

When we consider destitution in subnational regions in Sub-Saharan Africa, an even starker pattern emerges. In **97 subnational regions with a total population of 231 million people, more than 50% of the population are destitute**. More than 80% of people are destitute in 13 regions belonging to Chad, South Sudan, Burkina Faso, and Nigeria.

### East Asia and the Pacific

We have destitution figures for all East Asian and Pacific countries (EAP) covered except Vanuatu. However, here is the rather large surprise: on average, across EAP countries covered a total of **36.6 million people**, or **26% of MPI poor people are destitute**. This figure, like that of MPI, is polarized but with some differences: Thailand has the lowest rates of destitution and in, Vietnam, China, Mongolia and Philippines, 2% or less of the population are poor. In Indonesia 4% of the population are destitute, in Lao and Cambodia 13 to 14%, and in Timor Leste, 49% of the population are destitute, which corresponds to a high ratio of 72% of MPI poor people being also destitute.

When we consider destitution in subnational EAP regions we see that in four regions, 25%–30% of people are destitute, and in 15 regions, 10%–30% of people are destitute. But in 66 subnational regions, less than 10% of people are destitute, and in 52 regions, less than 5% of the population are destitute.
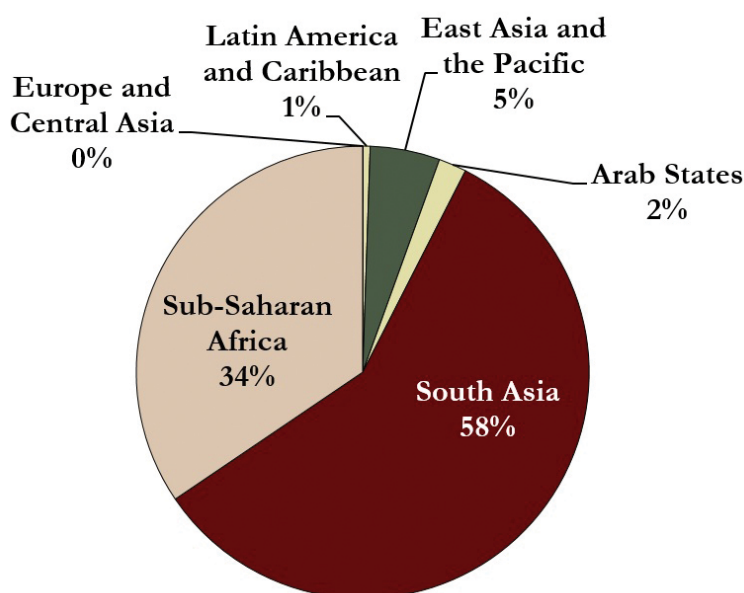
### Arab States

We have destitution for nine of our 12 Arab States, but unfortunately lack destitution for three of the four poorest countries: Djibouti, Yemen, and Somalia. The diversity is astounding. On average, across nine Arab States covered, a total of **14.7 million people**, or **43% of MPI poor people are destitute**. This figure is polarized: in Libya, Palestine, Jordan, Syria and Iraq the proportion of MPI poor who are destitute is low: 4% to 12%. In Tunisia, a low MPI country, it is 22%, suggesting pockets of poverty. In Egypt it is 20%, and in Morocco and Sudan, over 50% of MPI poor people are destitute.

### Latin America and the Caribbean

Our **measure of destitution also shows interesting results** for 14 Latin American and Caribbean countries. Destitution ranges from a low of **0.03% in Santa Luci**a to a troubling high of **1% in Haiti**. Destitute rates are 0.3% in Barbados; 0.5% in Jamaica; 0.6% in Mexico, Trinidad and Tobago, and the Dominican Republic; 0.7% in Ecuador; 1.1% in Guyana; 1.3% in Belize; 1.6% in Suriname; 2.0% in Peru; 2.3% in Honduras; and 2.9% in Nicaragua.

## Where do destitute people live?



- Europe and Central Asia 0%
- Latin America and Caribbean 1%
- East Asia and the Pacific 5%
- Arab States 2%
- South Asia 58%
- Sub-Saharan Africa 34%

## Destitute in Cameroon – Issa's story

Sixty-seven-year-old Issa lives with his wife and seven children in the Far North Region of Cameroon. Although not malnourished, Issa's family has suffered the loss of two children under the age of five, making them deprived in the health dimension according to the MPI. Issa's surviving children live with their father and mother in a small compound of conical huts. Although some of Issa's children attend school, others remain at home in order to work. This means Issa's household is deprived in the MPI's education dimension. Cooking fuel – wood, dung, crop waste, and charcoal – is not always available and cooking is therefore irregular.

Because Issa's home has no flooring, no electricity, no toilet of any sort, and lacks any of the household assets listed in the MPI survey (radio, bicycle, mobile phone, etc.), Issa and his household are also deprived in the MPI standard of living dimension. As Issa's neighbours also lack toilets and use the

bush for waste elimination, and because their living space is shared with farm animals, sanitation is very poor. Issa is deprived in just above 60% of the weighted indicators of destitution.
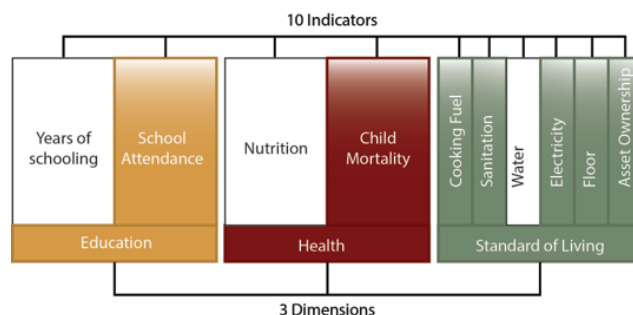


## Destitution data

Estimations of destitution are available for 82 countries in 2015, a significant increase from the 49 countries covered in June 2014. These 82 countries house 1.5 billion out of the total 1.6 billion MPI poor in the complete set of countries. Subnational estimations of destitution are available for 804 regions in 66 countries. These countries cover much of **South Asia**, including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan. We also have data on 35 out of our 39 **Sub-Saharan Africa**, covering Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, DR Congo, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Malawi, Mauritania, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, South Africa, Swaziland,

Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. In addition, nine of the 12 **Arab States** are covered (Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Sudan and Tunisia), as well as nine countries in **East Asia and the Pacific** (Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Lao, Mongolia, Philippines, Timor Leste, Thailand and Vietnam), ten from Europe and Central Asia (Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia , Tajikistan and Ukraine) and fourteen from **Latin America and the Caribbean** (Barbados, Belize, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, Saint Lucia, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago).

### NOTES

[1] In particular, these minimal computations assume that 100% of people who are destitute and income poor are deprived by both indicators in each country, and furthermore that destitution and $1.25/day rates match in every country other than the 52 countries compared. Both are a highly unlikely assumptions so the number of people who are destitute but are not $1.25/day poor is likely to be much higher.

[2] India's 2005/6 NFHS data are among the oldest datasets used in MPI 2015, and in South Asia. Hopefully once more recent data becomes available, it will show that poverty has reduced.

This briefing was updated in October 2015 due to adjustments in the CFPS sampling weights for China.

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