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Background paper

MDG MONITORING IN CIS AND SOUTH EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

ECE contribution to the Internet Report on the global monitoring of the MDG 2005.

The implementation and monitoring of MDG in the CIS and South East European (SEE) countries need to take in consideration the history of these countries and the situation that these countries are facing at the present. Some of the SEE countries used to enjoy relatively high levels of development but are currently recovering from wars with enormous material and human losses. Some of them have a current economic development that is 50 per cent or less of the levels reported in the pre-war period. The CIS countries have gone through the collapse of the Soviet Union and are still recovering from the economic crisis that followed this collapse.

The recent history of the CIS and SEE region puts some constraints to the standard MDG framework. If, at global level, 1990 is considered as the baseline to set up goals and targets and to monitor progress, the same year may not be a good benchmark for the region. 1990 signalled the transition period for many of the countries that became independent only shortly after. After 1990 the situation deteriorated rapidly on both economic and social development, and even some of the indicators have started to reverse their trends, they still have not reached the 1990 level. In addition, the statistical standards used in 1990 were still based on the old system, which was not always in line with the international standards currently used by most of the same countries. Indicators measured today against the 1990 level do not reflect the efforts made by the countries to recover from the decline and they may be affected by the use of different definitions and methodologies.

The monitoring of the goals and targets needs also to be adapted to the reality of these countries. In the region, to make the MDG more relevant to national needs, some countries adapted the MDG to their circumstances. For example, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Goal 1 was reformulated as "to reduce general poverty to the EU level average in 2015" and, in Georgia, Goal 2 was

reformulated as “to ensure coherence of Georgian educational systems with educational systems of developed countries through improved quality and institutional set up”. Some of the indicators have also been tailored to the needs of the region and to the need to highlight issues that global indicators would not reveal.

Income-Poverty

One of the most important issues that needs to be stressed on MDG in CIS and SEE countries is poverty. Comparing CIS and SEE countries on income- poverty rates based on PPP\$1 a day show a low prevalence of poverty if compared with other regions in the World. However, when national poverty lines are analyzed the situation is very different¹. An increasing trend of the proportion of people living under national poverty lines can be observed for all the CIS and SEE countries where data are available from 1995-1996 (where accurate data became available) to about the year 2000 when the percentage of people living below extreme poverty (as nationally defined) varied from 13.5 to 17 per cent for extreme poverty and from 15 to 83 per cent for general poverty². The recent trends still show for some countries an increase in the percentage of people living below poverty, but for the majority of the countries poverty is stable or is decreasing toward the achievement of Goal 1 thanks also to the economic recovering that some countries have experienced in the last 5 years.

The major reason that caused the sharp increase of poverty in CIS and SEE countries is the economic collapse of the 1990s triggered by the loss of markets after the break of the Soviet Union. But internal wars and natural disasters have also played a role. The disintegration of the Soviet Union has produced a serious impact on the water and energy system of many CIS countries that changed the environmental and social balance of the region. As result there is an increasing number of areas that are affected by droughts. The Aral Sea disaster³ is probably the most visible example of natural disasters in the region where the consequences in terms of poverty and living conditions of people are devastating (total collapse of the fishing industry, decrease of productivity of agriculture fields, increase of serious diseases, increase of respiratory system diseases, birth defects and high infant mortality rates). For example, in 2001 the regions of

¹ A measurement of poverty based on PPP \$1 a day is not relevant for the region The cold weather require more resources for heating, clothes and food, and PPP\$1 a day does not measure an adequate level of subsistence as it may do in other regions. The World Bank advises to use indicators based on PPP\$2-2.5, but the best measurements are based on national poverty lines where extreme poverty lines are in general established at the level of consumption sufficient only to provide for the minimum level of dietary energy consumption. There are also general poverty lines that represent the minimum level of consumption taking into account expenditures for both foodstuff and non-food goods and services. These thresholds seem to be more relevant since they consider not only food but also other expenditures that are crucial to survive in a cold weather. Some CIS and SEE countries particularly in Europe measure poverty using a relative concept (as the EU countries do) setting the poverty level to a defined percentage (from 60 to 75%) of the median cumulative spending per adult.

² Sources: National Official Statistics.

³ In the last decade, the Aral Sea has become to desiccate with the result that in a few years what was the fourth-largest lake in the world became the world's eighth-largest lake. Along the former shoreline, salt has accumulated due to evaporation. As a result of the strong winds in this area, the salt is picked up and transported by aeolic processes and through deflation lands on the irrigated fields in the south. In addition, the north of the Amu -Dar'ja delta used to be an important ecosystem with a large variety of flora and fauna. The increasing salinity and the water shortage have led to a vast degradation of these areas. In addition the productivity of the agricultural fields dropped significantly due to secondary salinization as a result of capillary uprising of soil water (http://www.dfd.dlr.de/app/land/aralsee/back_info.html).

Kazakhstan surrounding the Aral Sea experienced a percentage of people living in poverty (46%) that was almost double the national average (28.4%).

Low levels of wages, pensions and social benefits, inadequate social guarantees, high unemployment, high share of informal employment, and an increasing unequal distribution of income are still the factors that generate poverty in CIS and SEE countries. The economic growth of many of the countries in the region and specific measures taken to combat income-poverty⁴ helped to reduce poverty in some countries, but the challenges of the governments remain to target specific policies to poverty reduction. There is a general agreement among governments that unless continuing efforts are applied to address poverty, poverty will not disappear in its extreme forms. Measures adopted by some countries to address poverty include efforts to increase employment and the income level of the working population, while at the same time to increase the countries' competitiveness in the global market, via investing in technological development. Reforming the social security systems is also a priority in the agenda of many of the governments in the region. There is recognition that support to vulnerable social groups should be strengthened and that there is the need for targeted actions.

Malnutrition

As one manifestation of poverty, malnutrition is a problem for some, but not all, CIS and SEE countries. Food supply is still a problem particularly in the Caucasus countries and Central Asia where there is a general trend to reduce the proportion of undernourished people and underweight children that may lead to meet Goal 2. But, the proportion of the population below the minimum level of dietary energy consumption of 2100 Kcal is high varying from 22.9 in Armenia to 55.3 in Kyrgyzstan. Some increase in the per capita average diary energy was due to the enlargement of the share of bakeries rather than an enrichment of a balanced diet and the consumption of other products remains disproportionately low. One of the main problems in the area of nutrition is still deficiencies in iodine and iron. Remarkable achievements have been made by countries to reduce Iron Deficiency Anemia and low Iodine Deficiency Disorders (IDD). For example, the government of Georgia, in partnership with UNICEF, increased the import of adequately iodised salt (increasing the household consumption from 8% in 1999 to 67% in 2003) and the public awareness. However, IDD still remains a major public health concern in some countries, and in Georgia, for example, 40% of the child and adult population are affected by iodine deficiency causing vulnerability to physical and mental retardation.

Gender equality

Gender equality plays a peculiar role in CIS and SEE countries. Traditionally, countries under the influence of the Soviet Union used to adopt quota systems to assure equal level of employment, and they still enjoy relative equal levels of educational enrolment and employment rates. However, looking at gender equality only through education and employment rates does not provide an accurate view of gender disparities. The price of transition has been paid unequally for men and women, and if women have lost ground on powerful positions⁵, men have been more

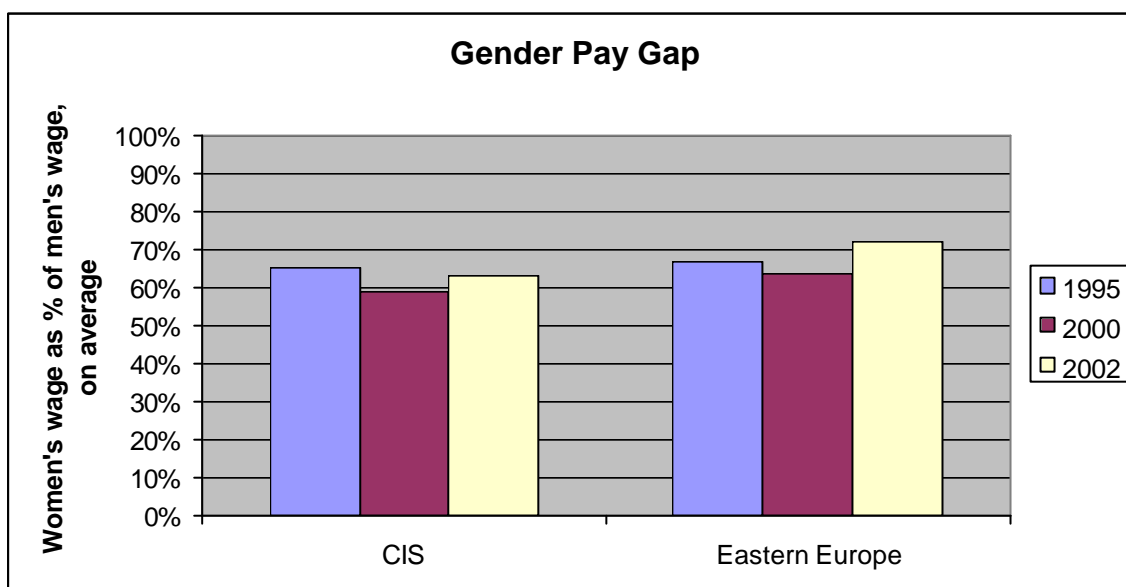
⁴ In Armenia, for example, the government introduced the state system of family allowances that contributed to reducing the proportion of extremely poor from 27.7 in 1996 to 22.9 in 1999 (*Source: Armenia, Millennium Development Goals Status of Implementation 2001*). In Ukraine, government policies raised minimum social guarantees (for example minimum wage and minimum pension) contributing to move the proportion of poor from 14% to 11% (*Source: Millennium Development Goals Ukraine, 2003*).

⁵ As the MDG indicator shows on proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments.

affected by increased mortality⁶. An indicator widely used to measure gender disparity in SEE and CIS countries is gender pay gap⁷. As the graphic below shows, in both Eastern Europe and CIS countries, on average, women's wages as a percentage of men's wages decreased after the 1995 increasing the difference between women and men earnings. However, the initial data for 2002 show a positive trend toward the achievement of gender equality in wages.

Education

General indicators on enrolment in primary education and literacy show a relatively good system of education in CIS and SEE countries if compared with other regions in the world. However, the difficulties encountered during the transition period have also affected the educational system. If in the past these countries were enjoying free access to a good system of primary and secondary education, currently the quality of education is becoming an issue and with the increase role of the private sector, the accessibility to education is also affecting many pupils. School attendance is also becoming a concern but national official statistics are very scarce⁸.



Source: ECE Gender statistics database and national publications. Data for CIS countries in 2002 is based only on two countries.

Infant and child mortality

Inheriting a relatively good health system from the past, infant and child mortality rates are low, if compared with those in other regions of the world. In official figures, based on administrative records, the price of the transition is visible in the trends with an increase in both infant and child mortality during the mid 90s and a restabilising decline after 1995 and 1996. However, data

⁶ In countries, such as Belarus, Ukraine, and the Russian Federation, men experienced a life expectancy up to 12 years lower than the life expectancy of women.

⁷ Defined as the average of all women wages as proportion of the average of all men wages.

⁸ In Kyrgyzstan for example, data from the National Statistical Committee show that 95% of 7-16 years old children receive basic secondary education, but studies conducted by UNICEF and UNESCO indicated that a significant number of children do not attend school and that the number of children not attending school is 7-10 times higher than the number of children official registered as not been enrolled (*Source: Millennium Development Goals Progress Report of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2003*).

collected through surveys provide a different picture with higher (sometime double) rates of child and infant mortality, and a trend that in some countries shows an increase in mortality. This does not only reflect an acutization of the problems related to children health, but also the deterioration of the registration systems. If, in the past, these systems were very efficient, the lack of resources to adequately maintain them is jeopardizing their relevance. There are also differences in the definition of deaths. In some CIS countries only births of 1000 gr. or more are still reported instead of 500 gr. or more as it is internationally recommended.

Tuberculosis

One of the problems that is affecting both SEE and CIS countries is the re-emergence of tuberculosis among the general population. If, in the last 40 years, these countries experienced a steady decline, the number of cases of tuberculosis is dramatically increasing in recent years and, particularly, in urban areas. The coverage of DOTS⁹ programmes in 2002 reached almost 100% in countries, such as Kazakhstan, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kyrgyzstan, and Georgia. In these countries, there is still not a stable decrease of the spread of TB, but deaths due to TB are slowly decreasing. DOTS coverage is low (not higher than 30-35%) in 6 countries. In Belarus, where cases notified of TB and number of deaths is continuously increasing, there was no implementation of DOTS programmes until 2002. In Ukraine and Russia, where the highest number of TB cases and deaths are recorded, the DOTS coverage has increased and has reached 15 and 25 per cent in 2002.

HIV

In many countries there are not reliable surveillance systems to detect the spread of HIV infections and data reported by official statistics reflect only the reported cases and often are able to describe only the surface of the problem. With the exception of Ukraine and Russia (reference to the report on Goal 6), the number of cases of HIV officially reported is very low (not higher than 500). There is in all countries an increasing trend, but the number of officially detected cases underestimates the spread of infection in many countries¹⁰.

Water

Until the 1990's, in CIS countries, the environmental and health effects of water pollution, unsafe sources of water supply, inadequate sanitation and poor hygiene were underestimated, mainly due to the non-availability of environmental data reports. It is now evident that water pollution and overexploitation of resources for drinking water and irrigation is causing serious environmental problems. Moreover in the 1990s floods became one of the most costly "water-quantity" problems and large proportions of water supply networks have completely deteriorated, particularly, in non-urban areas. Population's access to an improved water source is highly unequal in urban and rural areas. In Georgia¹¹, for example the proportion of people with access to an improved water source is 95% in urban areas and 35% in rural areas.

Additional challenges to an effective and fair water management are posed by its trans-national nature. As transboundary water resources play a significant role in the whole region [*with more*

⁹ Source: World Health Organization, Regional Office for Europe.

¹⁰ In Kyrgyzstan for example there were only 402 HIV cases registered in 2003. But according to assessments conducted according to the UNAIDS recommendations, the actual number of HIV infected were 3620 (Source: *Millennium Development Goals Progress Report of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2003*).

¹¹ Source: Georgian Ministry of Infrastructure and Development.

than 150 major transboundary rivers, over 100 transboundary groundwater aquifers and around 30 international lakes] specific actions have been taken to ensure that waters are used in reasonable and equitable way. In particular, specific actions are being undertaken under the 1992 ECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes. To enhance water productivity, the challenge is to implement specific measures of demand management and rational use of water as well as to protect water-related ecosystems, such as forests and wetlands, which are an important source of water supply.

Statistical Capacity

The CIS and East European countries have inherited a very rich system of administrative records able to produce a large number of statistics. However, the transition from the planned economy to the market economy has affected not only the efficiency of these administrative records but also their relevance. The type of information needed in both the economic and social area is very different from the past. The system of administrative records established in the past still produces a large amount of numbers (statistics), showing a high production of statistics. However, many of the statistics produced are not always relevant to the new social and economic environment and the coverage has also been affected. Many of the important issues that became relevant after transition can be adequately measured only through population-based data collection activities (sample surveys or censuses). Issues such as poverty or unemployment if measured through a registration system show very different patterns than if measured through surveys or censuses.

Since the mid 90s all Eastern Europe and CIS countries have moved, at different speeds, from a statistical system almost exclusively based on administrative registrations to a more complete one, where sample surveys are also used. Some countries have already a permanent survey programme with regular labour force and income and expenditure surveys, but some countries still carry out surveys on an ad-hoc basis and only with the support of the donor community. Great efforts have also been made to convert the old statistical systems to better meet international standards.

Data required to adequately monitor MDG are quite demanding since a variety of topics need to be collected on a regular basis in order to have time series and assess the trend toward the achievement of the Goals. Not all countries are able to produce high quality data on all the areas covered by the MDG on a regular basis. Household surveys have gradually spread in many countries, thus providing analytical and trustworthy data on issues like employment and income/expenditure. On the other hand, the quality of administrative data has in many cases deteriorated because of falling coverage and inaccurate reporting. The population census has been held in most countries of the region, but financial and/or political problems brought to the cancellation/postponement of the census in a few countries.
