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## THE STATUS OF THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN THE UNECE REGION

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This is a shortened version of the essay which appears in the UNECE Report for 2008 (available at [http://www.unece.org/pub/cat/topics/annual\\_report\\_2008.pdf](http://www.unece.org/pub/cat/topics/annual_report_2008.pdf)).

### Diversity within the UNECE region

Covering the whole European continent, North America, and Central Asia, the UNECE region is characterized by a tremendous diversity in its levels of economic development.

This situation is reflected in the degree of achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) within the UNECE region: while the MDG targets have largely been reached in the countries of North America, Western and Central Europe, a significant number of them are still a challenge for most of the countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) and South-Eastern Europe (SEE).

The most challenging ones relate to poverty, gender equality, child mortality, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and access to water. These challenges for the achievement of the MDGs are particularly acute in rural areas, for women as well as for some ethnic minorities.

### Poverty reduction (MDG 1)

According to recent data, the EECCA/SEE countries have overall recovered from economic recession thanks to sustained economic growth since 2000, and this has substantially reduced the level of poverty, however in an uneven manner – the pace of economic growth was very diverse and spectacular economic growth has not always gone in parallel with falling poverty levels. This clearly shows that economic growth, while being an important requirement, should be accompanied by pro-poor policies so that such growth leads to improved living conditions of the entire population.

In particular, in the resource rich countries, the benefits of growth resulting from commodity exports have not sufficiently trickled down to the poorest members of the population, this being due in particular to a lack of diversification of productive activities, especially towards those which are labour intensive and an insufficient redistribution of the surplus through income transfers or targeted social programmes.

For the low income countries, the significantly lower growth rate has not been mitigated so far by an official development assistance (ODA) level commensurate with the financing needs of these countries for a substantial poverty reduction. Another major reason for the persistence of poverty is the employment situation: with a very few exceptions, the activity rate since 2000 in EECCA countries has not significantly increased and even declined in some cases. Overall, it stayed within the range of 45% to 55%, except for the Russian Federation where it is stable at 66%.

### Regional and ethnic dimensions of poverty

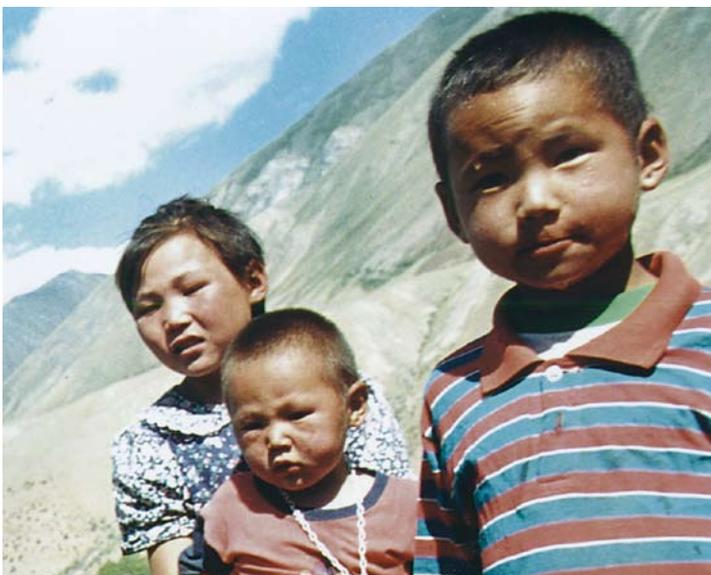
The need for specific measures to improve the living conditions of some disadvantaged groups within the population is also highlighted by the territorial and ethnic dimensions of poverty. So while a trend towards poverty reduction can be observed in the EECCA/SEE countries, there is still a large proportion of the population in a situation of relative poverty, with part of it still living in absolute poverty (under \$2 a day). Such a situation affects, in particular, rural areas, the unemployed and unskilled labour, ethnic minorities, retired and elderly persons, single parent households and persons with health problems.



## **Gender dimension (MDG 3)**

Much progress is still needed to achieve full equality in the opportunities for men and women. Growth has not diminished inequalities in economic opportunities among men and women. In EECCA and SEE, the recent return to high levels of women's participation in the labour market usually reflects their flexibility in accepting low paid jobs. So women's jobs are increasingly concentrated at the lower-end of the labour market and this is combined with a moderate share of women in managerial and decision-making positions despite high levels of women's education. Such "mismatch" is clearly a loss in terms of efficient use of resources. This form of segregation in the labour market could be illustrated by a persistent wage gap, and data from recent years show that even in periods of economic growth the pay gap has not fallen, with the exception of a few countries such as Armenia and Ukraine.

Lower wages combined with cuts and a deterioration of public services, including in child care and a move towards market based pension systems, has made women more prone to poverty.



## **Child mortality (MDG 4)**

If the general trend of child mortality is positive and many countries of the region show a declining pattern, international estimates of child mortality suggest that, for a number of countries, the pace of decrease is not fast enough to achieve by 2015 the MDG target of reducing child mortality by two-thirds. In particular, in the countries of Central Asia and Azerbaijan, child mortality is estimated to be between 60 and 100 deaths per 1,000 live births: so depending on the country, 6 to 10 children out of 100 do not achieve 5 years of age. From a policy perspective there is a need to maintain or even increase the focus of health expenditure on primary health care and structures.

## **HIV AIDS and tuberculosis (MDG 6)**

According to recently released estimates by UNAIDS, the number of people living with HIV in EECCA is about 1.6 million compared to 630,000 in 2001. The Russian Federation and Ukraine accounted for almost 90% of newly reported HIV diagnoses in 2006.

Countries in the region are putting in place systems to monitor the spread of the epidemics and, in some cases, the increasing number of newly reported HIV cases can also be seen as a progressive improvement of the sentinel system. However, it appears that the epidemic is not yet under full control.

Another health problem affecting both EECCA and SSE countries is the re-emergence of tuberculosis. Long considered as being under control in all of these countries, the situation deteriorated in the second half of the 1990s and, despite measures put in place to control tuberculosis, recent data show that it is far from being stopped. Incidence rates of tuberculosis (number of new cases per 10,000 population, per year) are particularly high in Central Asia – usually between 120 and 140 (the incidence rate in countries of the EU25 is around 20).

## **Piped water (MDG 7)**

Access to safe water (MDG 7) remains a problem in a number of EECCA/SEE countries. The most recent data on the percentage of households reached by piped water show that good infrastructures exist in urban areas (usually more than 80% of urban dwellings have piped water), while the percentage of dwellings connected to water pipes is still very low in rural areas (in ten countries of the region less than 30% of rural dwellings have piped water). The need to invest substantially in primary infrastructures is therefore essential for the provision of water for domestic use in rural areas, which is a critical factor to preserve public health and carefully manage natural resources.

## **Conclusions**

As demonstrated in this brief review and like the other regional commissions, UNECE ensures the regional monitoring of MDG trends through statistical information. It also offers a platform for all stakeholders to share their views and experience in the implementation of the goals which are still a challenge for a significant number of its member States. Addressing this challenge implies fighting the various forms of poverty which still exist in the region through an inclusive development process. This requires a policy mix which combines macroeconomic policies enabling a sustained growth path; structural policies to maximize job creation through geographical and sectoral diversification of activities; and social policies geared towards combating gender and ethnic discrimination and ensuring universal access to education and health.